A STUDY OF FIELD AND SEED SYMBOLISM IN THE BIBLICAL STORY OF RUTH

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At the end of a study such as this one, which has emphasized the relationship between the interpretation of a text and the perspective of the interpreter, it is most appropriate to thank those who have contributed to my study of scripture in so many ways. My gratitude goes first of all to my religious community which has given me time to study, support, encouragement and love while I have done so. It is my hope that the sisters in my community will be able to reap the benefits of what they have sown. I would also like to thank my family, my teachers, my students and my friends who have aided me in so many ways. Finally, I am gratefully in the debt of the hungry of the world, and of those who work with them, for much of what I have said of the story of Ruth--this story of the return of seed to the field, of the gracious concern of God for those who turn to him.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A number of lines of inquiry converge in this dissertation. Among them are questions about the similarities within classical literatures of various cultures: how does one account for the presence of similar stories, patterns and motifs in ancient myths and in scripture? what does the presence of common material suggest for humanistic studies? A second set of questions has arisen in response to E. F. Campbell's sensitive commentary on the book of Ruth: what is the relation between the artistic form of the story and the meaning? how exactly does the artistry help convey meaning? Pursuit of these questions has resulted in a more general question about meaning in texts--and specifically in the classics: how do they communicate? why do they continue to have deep meaning for us? how do we understand and interpret them in a way that is faithful both to them and to our contemporary existence? how is it that we can be both enriched by them and also in some sense enrich them?

I have chosen to focus these rather general questions by investigating the story of Ruth as it comes to us in the

Hebrew Bible.[1] My intention is to investigate the meaning of the story and the process of how the meaning is communicated. I began the task hoping that I would work out a methodology for such an investigation; I have found instead a deeper knowledge than I had before of principles of interpretation and indeed of the art of understanding itself. I am also suggesting a fuller and richer meaning in the story than is usual in the literature on the book of Ruth. I have been guided by the assumption that only the real meaning of the story is truly life-giving[2] and that the life to be given by such a meaning is great indeed. It is my hope that this dissertaion will nourish such life for those who search for it in the scriptures and in other classics.

There are a number of reasons why the book of Ruth is an apt choice for an investigation of meaning. The Hebrew text is excellent, on the whole, and there are very few places where it is unclear.[1] The Hebrew story is most beautifully told with numerous indications of carefully planned artistry--all of which can help convey meaning. The story itself is not particularly difficult to understand; though it does have enough puzzles to challenge the ingenuity of the audience, it also has sufficient clues to provide a fairly satisfactory solution to them as well. It has a number of features which seem common to other stories--both scriptural and non-scriptural, both Ancient Near Eastern and later western tales. It is in some senses rather isolated from other books of the Old Testament, being neither a part of a larger work nor particularly similar to most of the other books either in subject matter or in form; even its immediate contexts of time and place and historical circumstances are not very clear. On the other hand its position in both the Hebrew scriptures and in the Christian Bible as a whole makes a crucial contribution to the story's meaning.

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[1] My purpose in limiting the study to the Masoretic text (Biblia Hebraica, 3d ed. Edited by R. Kittel et. al. (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1937) is not out of a disregard for the importance of the other versions but rather to bring some limitation to a project already large enough. It would be cumbersome to study rhetorical features and semantic resonance of the story in more than one language. To limit the investigation to one articulation of the story is also to underscore the notion that each telling of the story is in some senses both unique and complete.

[2] S. M. Schneiders, I.H.M., "Faith, Hermeneutics, and the Literal Sense of Scripture," Theological Studies 39 (1978):720 (hereafter cited as Schneiders, "Literal Sense").

Theory and Plan of Interpretation

With the general purposes of the study noted, it is now appropriate to indicate some of the assumptions upon which it has rested, in the hope of providing an adequate philosophical base for the interpretation I am proposing. I will proceed from the more general points to those which pertain more specifically to the following five chapters of this study. These tenets are derived primarily from the language philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whose theories I have found to be the most helpful in my efforts to discuss the question of meaning in texts.

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[1] Two important exceptions to this condition occur at 2:7 and 4:5. It is impossible to read 2:7 without emendation; 4:5 has consonants for one reading but is pointed for another.

My most basic presupposition is that the nature of reality is linguistic. The human person is that living thing whose Being is essentially determined by the potentiality for discourse.[1] As human beings we participate in language; language is already meaningful prior to our participation in it.[2] Language is not buckets to be filled but wellsprings which are found.[3] Our common participation in language in order to express our being is one of the primary reasons human beings are able to share meaning. Language is not a univalent, agreed-upon sign; it is not a transparent envelope.[1] All language, and literary expression in particular, is polyvalent, complex and ambiguous.[2]

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[1] M. Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 203 ff. (hereafter cited as Heidegger, Being).

[2] H. G. Gadamer, "Man and Language," in Philosophical Hermeneutics, trans. and ed. D. E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 62 ff. (hereafter cited as Gadamer, Hermeneutics).

[3] M. Heidegger, What Is Called Thinking, trans. F. D. Wieck and J. G. Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 130.

A text is a particular type of expression of reality among other possible linguistic expressions. A text is not merely an object but is a work bearing a human touch. A work must be interpreted so that the human imprint--the meaning--can be understood.[3] Meaning is not contained in a text, merely placed there in the past. The meaning of a text is defined in terms of questions put to it from the present perspective, questions that though asked in the present arise from presuppositions which themselves come from the tradition in which we stand, interacting with the text encountered.[4] The text is not a container of meaning but a mediation of meaning.[5] A text does not have any meaning one wishes to assign to it, but every significant text has a fulness of meaning which cannot be exhausted; every valid interpretation is a unique actualization of the meaning.[1] If interpretation always rises from the past, is always grounded in something we already know, then there is no such thing as presuppositionless understanding.[2] The Cartesian subject-object dichotomy is challenged; we and the world are one-insofar as our participation in the world is inevitable.[3] There is no truly objective interpretation.

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[1] R. Alter, "Biblical Narrative," Commentary 61 (1976):67.

[2] L. Alonso-Schökel, S.J., "Hermeneutics in the Light of Language and Literature," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 25 (1963): 380 (hereafter cited as Alonso-Schökel, "Hermeneutics").

[3] R. E. Palmer, Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p.7.

[4] Palmer, pp. 182-183, discussing Gadamer's thought.

[5] Schneiders, "Literal Sense," p. 730.

Closely related to these concepts of language and meaning and interpretation is that of truth. Truth is unhiddenness, a letting something come to existence in language.[4] It is not a matter of correlation of label to identity. Truth is disclosed by a dialectical process of proposing questions to the text to which it will respond, thus questioning the interpreter.[5] R. E. Palmer points out important implications of this view of truth: "When truth is conceived as something which both emerges and plunges back into concealment, when the hermeneutical act places the interpreter on the border of that creative emptiness out of which the work emerged, then the interpretation must be creatively open to the as yet unsaid."[6]

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[1] Ibid., p. 731. [2] Heidegger, Being, pp. 191-192.

[3] J. Macquarrie, Martin Heidegger (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1968), p. 14.

[4] Ibid., p. 26.

[5] Palmer, p. 165, discussing Gadamer's thought.

[6] Ibid., p. 147, discussing Heidegger's thought.

Interpretation is at once a repetition of the original event of disclosure and at the same time a new event of disclosure.[1] When we read a literary work of art, we enter it and recreate it and add richness to the original insight. The work as a whole mediates a truth beyond even the vision of truth which animated the writer.[2] Analogously, we may compare such a reading to the performance of a piece of music. "The text functions like a musical composition, which cannot be rendered except by genuine fidelity to the score but which will be rendered differently by each artist."[3] To understand, in this sense, already involves an application to the text to the present.[4] "We only understand the new world because we are already participating in the structures of self-understanding which make it truth for us. This is the real basis for the same thing being understood as what was intended."[1] "The work of art has its authentic being in the fact that, in becoming experience, it transforms the experiencer; the work of art works."[2]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 147-148, discussing Heidegger's thought.

[2] Ibid., p. 147.

[3] Schneiders, "Literal Sense," p. 731. She adds on p. 732, referring to Gadamer's thought, that in this sense the text always exceeds the conscious intention of the author.

[4] H. G. Gadamer, Truth and Method (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 291 ff. (hereafter cited as Gadamer, Truth). He suggests the analogy of juridical hermeneutics, where the interpretation must comprise not only the explanation of what the text means in its own milieu but what it means in its present situation.

Hermeneutics, then, is not so much an aggregate of rules of how to interpret texts but a study of the act of understanding itself.[3] However, the task is not to divine the intent of the author, to reconstruct his or her mental processes,[4] but to focus on the author's expression of his or her experience[5] which we as other human beings can share, since a likeness exists between the mental experience of one person and that of another.[6] It is the "interpretation of the being of Dasein,"[7] setting forth the structures of possibility for it--an analysis of the being's authentic possibilities for being.[1] The task is "to bring the text out of the alienation in which it finds itself [as fixed, written form], back into the living present of dialogue whose primodial fulfillment is question and answer."[2]

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[1] Palmer, p. 169, discussing Gadamer's thought.

[2] Ibid., p. 174, discussing Gadamer's thought.

[3] Ibid., pp. 85-86, discussing Schleiermacher's contribution to modern hermeneutics.

[4] This goal of reconstruction was one Schleiermacher maintained: Palmer, pp. 86, 89.

[5] Ibid., p. 121, summarizing the contribution of Dilthey.

[6] Ibid., p. 104. Also in E. V. McKnight, Meaning in Texts: The Historical Shaping of a Narrative Hermeneutics (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), pp. 27-28, discussing Dilthey's contribution.

[7] Heidegger, Being, pp. 36-38.

There are certain texts which we call classics, "so significant in content and beautiful in form that they have perennial value and therefore enjoy a certain contemporaneity with people of every age."[3] Many myths and texts of the great world religions are classical in this sense. Much of the Bible, and certainly the story of Ruth, falls under this designation. The questions of hermeneutics press strongly here. It is important that we continue to enter these texts, seek to understand them and allow them to address our contemporary situation. That a particular religious perspective sees the Bible as inspired does not diminish in any way any of its characteristics as a written expression of language; such a perspective simply indicates a specification of the nature of the meaning. The Bible, being language--and richly symbolic literary language--is in need of and responsive to hermeneutical processes as are other classical texts.

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[1] Palmer, p. 130.

[2] Gadamer, Truth, p. 49; clarified by Palmer, p. 200.

[3] Schneiders, "Literal Sense," p. 730, discussing Gadamer's thought.

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A particular feature of literature, and surely of classical literature, is its use of symbol. A symbol may be defined as a sensible reality which renders present and involves a person subjectively in a transforming experience of the mystery of the transcendent.[1] A symbol is a reality--born out of life, derived from a common experience and a common manner of responding to that experience. It renders present the reality in which it shares and in fact can only do so insofar as it participates in what it represents. The symbols in our human experience are used as windows on the transcendent.[2] The symbol both reveals and conceals. On one level its revelation is universal since it is born from life;[3] but simultaneously it also conceals meaning, since in rendering a reality present in one specific way, it limits the expression of the reality.[4] There are also historical or cultural associations with symbols which are not transparent to all of us.[5] The artist's choice of symbolic material is not artibrary. He or she chooses aspects of the physical subject and then sees--and lets be seen--the universal through the particular in such a way that the former is liberated without the latter being destroyed.[1]

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[1] S. M. Schneiders, I.H.M., "The Johannine Resurrection Narrative: An Exegetical and Theological Study of John 20" (S.T.D. dissertation, Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, Rome, 1975), pp. 13 ff. (hereafter cited as Schneiders, "Resurrection Narrative").

[2] T. Fawcett, The Symbolic Language of Religion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971), pp. 27-31.

[3] Ibid., p. 27.

[4] Schneiders "Resurrection Narrative," p. 15.

[5] Fawcett, pp. 28-29.

An early question which I proposed to the text of Ruth was whether or not there is a symbol, basic to the story, the perception of which would be the primary entry to the story's meaning. Preliminary readings of the story indicated that the seed-field complex might be such a symbol. The seed is a symbol emerging from nature, from agriculture and from the human condition. A tiny element, derived from the parent stock, separates itself from that stock and reestablishes itself in a new medium. Fructified by that medium, it has also within itself the power to develop, and in time and with appropriate conditions it grows to resemble the stock from which it comes. In time, it too, produces seed which separates itself--and the cycle continues. The natural symbolism of the field--receiving rain and seed and then producing vegetation--is clear enough and quite apt for expressing human procreation, and is a symbol found rather frequently in Ancient Near Eastern materials. The ability of the land to nurture what is sown in it and to produce further growth is also a suitable

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[1] Schneiders, "Resurrection Narrative," p. 62.

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expression for the mysteries of human generativity--physical and otherwise. With this image in mind, I began my investigation. General theory suggested a number of areas that would need exploration, both in order to validate my hypothesis and to understand the communication of the symbol.

The first area of investigation, then, and the second chapter of this study, is what recent scripture study calls the rhetorical features of the text: close study of the particular ways in which an individual text makes its communication, ways which might more generally be considered part of style. The first task of rhetorical criticism is to determine the literary unit and its next task is to begin to discern the figures (for example, parallelism, chiasm and inclusion, anaphora, etc.) which indicate the intent of the storyteller.[1] There are two advantages to beginning the study here: first, the rhetorical aspects of a story are relatively easy to isolate temporarily from other aspects and problems of the story--and are in some cases even instructive for the problems; second, if the form of the story--the manner in which it is told--is really as significant a participant in the meaning as I contend, it should reflect the dominant symbol. The form of the story is not incidental to what is said, is not simply one of a number of neutral packages in which content can be placed. The artist crafts in order to be persuasive, and to understand his or her techniques is to understand the story better.[1] The form helps create the meaning; the concrete literary work is a sign constituted by the correspondence of signifier and signified.[2] The way in which the meaning is stated is part of the meaning.[3] A study of rhetorical features, corroborating the hypothesis, leads to deeper levels of inquiry.

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[1] J. Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," Journal of Biblical Literature 88 (1969):1-18.

The next area of investigation, chapter three of the dissertation, is those features of the story which can loosely be termed "content" of the story: time and place factors, plot and character relationships. Though these elements--and the plot in particular--are not synonymous with the story's meaning, so that to understand the plot is to have understood the story, to understand them well is crucial for a deeper perception of the story's meaning. The dominant issue in criticsm on Ruth is how the law, particularly the levirate, functions in the story. All attempts to explain the story must deal with this question. The law is meant to function as a backdrop to the story, a set of expectations in relation to which the characters live. The expectations are not as clear to us as they should be in order to function effectively as a backdrop. I choose to interpret the plot from within the logic set up by the story of Ruth alone, rather than to bring in legal material from other texts. The investigation of the "content" features strengthens the conviction that a basic seed symbol pervades the study of Ruth but it is also evident that it is more complete to think of a seed and field configuration, with seed being the masculine aspect and the field being the feminine aspect of the symbol.

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[1] G. P. Ridout, "Prose Compositional Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam. 7,9-20; 1 Kings 1-2)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, 1971), pp. 1,4.

[2] L. Alonso-Schökel, S.J., "Hermeneutic Problems of a Literary Approach to the Old Testament," Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, Edinburgh Congress, 1974 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), p.7.

[3] J. Barr, "Reading the Bible as Literature," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 56 (1973):22.

The content features, however, are themselves a product of factors called motifs--elements of detail or action which give the story its texture, and which, being highly traditional, are also heavy with meaning. The fertility-related motifs of the story are the next place to investigate the story's communication. Since the question of meaning goes beyond the intent of the author, and since one of my basic questions concerns similarities among mythic texts of various cultures, for chapter four of this paper I have selected materials from various cultures to help disclose the meaning of Ruth. Narratives which deal explicitly with both fertility in nature and fertility on the human level as Ruth does,

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were selected from the stories of six cultures. A few points need to be offered in order to clarify the purposes underlying this phase of research.

For centuries--from the time of the ancient Greeks themselves--until fairly recently, myth and myths were seen as basically untruthful.[1] Even when the classical culture came to be welcomed and absorbed by the Church, as it was, for example, during the Renaissance, the myths were interpreted allegorically or through a Christian lens so that they could be appreciated without being a danger to the faith.[2] Since the eighteenth century, modern efforts to understand myth have been more varied. Sometimes the search has been for their origin--whether in time, in nature, in the human psyche, in celestial phenomena. Other scholars sought to explain the truth of myth by reference to philology, to historical events, to rituals. Sometimes the myths are discussed in ways that either implicitly or explicitly sever them from ourselves: they are merely stories about gods no longer acknowledged, or they represent a mode of cognition peculiar to primitive human beings.[3]

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[1] J. W. Rogerson, Myth in Old Testament Interpretation (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), p. 1.

[2] J. deVries, The Study of Religion: An Historical Approach, trans. K. W. Bolle (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1976), pp. 24-28.

[3] Rogerson, pp. 175 ff.

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More fruitful, and more compatible with presuppositions noted earlier, are approaches which see myth as a mode of cognition, or, less narrowly, as a semantic system akin to language.[1] Such a designation is still rather general but can serve a useful purpose by indicating a relationship to what has been said above about language, meaning, symbol and interpretation. Both the processes which have produced the myths and the processes by which we continue to participate in their meaning are intertwined with the human effort to bring being to expression and to experience the transcendent. The highly symbolic literary language is the medium. Viewed from this perspective, there is no real dichotomy between myth and a narrative like Ruth. Both use symbolic language to communicate their meaning. They share meaning if they are using common symbols, and hence insights into one may enrich understanding of another. A study of the fertility motifs common to the narratives, and in particular the investigation of two sets of stories in terms of Ruth, serves to deepen the understanding of the richness of communication offered in the biblical story.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 175 ff., 187-188.

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The investigation of fertility-related motifs can be carried on with additional benefit when a common language and a single tradition are investigated. Some of the same motifs shared by Ruth and by stories from diverse cultures are investigated in chapter five to see what sort of uses they have within the Bible itself. The motifs, then, are in some senses universal[1] but also laden with meaning through use and reuse within a particular tradition.[2] The traditional elements can be visualized as being used somewhat like a grammar.[3] The storyteller of Ruth, for example, chose either because of conscious or unconscious[4] motivation to use certain motifs and expressions already part of the tradition and familiar to those whose tradition it was. In discussing oral formulaic M. N. Nagler suggests that what the poet inherited was essentially habits, techniques and tendencies rather than completed entities.[1] A template or Gestalt could generate a limitless number of entities for an endless variety of contexts, all related, but not expressing just one essential idea.[2] Such a theory helps underline an important factor in interpretation: whether the story of Ruth is composed with conscious or unconscious reference to other materials, before or after them, once it has entered the set of Hebrew literature it participates in the meaning of the whole set. Motifs, then, are cognate and interdependent for fulness of meaning. From that perspective it is valid to seek to understand the story of Ruth in terms of the story of the Exodus, whose motifs it uses, and in terms of the foreign woman, the harlot-bride in Hosea and Ezekiel, whose imagery it also echoes. A final step in this investigation of the meaning of Ruth within its own canon is to look at it briefly in

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[1] Universal in this sense suggests that the motifs are at least meaningful in many cultures.

[2] L. L. Thompson, Introducing Biblical Literature: A More Fantastic Country (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978), pp. 42-43.

[3] R. Scholes and R. Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 25.

[4] D. F. Rauber, "The Book of Ruth," in Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives, ed. K. R. R. Gros Louis, J. Ackerman, and T. S. Warshaw (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 168 (hereafter cited as Rauber, "Ruth") says that the artist consciously intends all allusions. The line of thought developed in this dissertation would indicate that such conscious knowledge is not necessary.

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[1] M. N. Nagler, Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. xxiii (hereafter cited as Nagler, Spontaneity).

[2] Ibid., pp. 2-13.

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relation to the gospel of John.[1]

There are a number of points underlying the belief that the interpretative process is not complete until the perspective of the interpreter is addressed specifically and until the text has done its questioning of the interpreter. Interpretation is constitutive of the meaning of a text. The reader interprets through his or her categories,[2] and the hearer's experience determines the limits through which he or she can understand the story's communication.[3] A work cannot induce an experience that the hearer is not prepared to have.[4] The context is given by the present moment of the interpreter; only within a specific context is a work meaningful.[1]

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[1] One common way of discussing the theory of interpretation of scripture has been to see it in terms of literal meaning (the meaning intended by the human author and inspired by God) and more-than-literal meaning (based on the assumption that the divine author might intend more than the human author could be aware of at the time of writing). E.g., R. E. Brown, S.S., "Hermeneutics," in The Jerome Biblical Commentary, 2 vols., ed. R. E. Brown, S.S., J. A. Fitzmyer, S.J., R. E. Murphy, O.Carm. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 2:605-623. Brown, p. 614, points out a number of approaches to interpretation that promise to offer results beyond the sort that modern historical criticism has yielded, among them the theories of the new hermeneutic, which see meaning not so much contained in the text as mediated by the text.

[2] Alonso-Schökel, "Hermeneutics," p. 375.

[3] Fawcett, p. 32.

[4] M. N. Nagler, "Mysticism: A Hard-Headed Definition for a Romantic Age," Studia Mystica 1 (1978):47.

The interpreter must listen to the communication of the text, both to what it expresses and to what it leaves unexpressed,[2] thus being led by the text.[3] "What is needed in literary interpretation is a dialectical questioning which does not simply interrogate the text but allows the thing said in the text to interrogate back, to call the interpreter's own horizon into question and to work a fundamental transformation of one's own understanding of the subject."[4] Or as T. Fawcett expresses it: symbolic discourse results in change; effective symbols are the places where we encounter ultimate reality in a meaningful way. Symbols demand response and commitment.[5] A significant work reveals truth as a property of being and makes an appeal to--elicits a response from--the person.[6] For this reason the final chapter of the dissertation offers some reflections on the contemporary problem of hunger and plenty in response to the truth mediated by the story of Ruth.

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[1] Palmer, p. 24.

[2] Ibid., p. 226.

[3] Ibid., p. 244.

[4] Ibid., p. 234.

[5] Fawcett, pp. 34-36.

[6] L. Alonso-Schökel, S.J., The Inspired Word: Scripture in the Light of Language and Literature, trans. F. Martin (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965), pp. 316-320.

Translation

Below is my translation of the Hebrew text of the book of Ruth, with notes on the portions that need comment. It is not my purpose to indicate all the areas of discussion or dispute, but only those which are particularly anomalous or which affect the study I have undertaken and which are not addressed elsewhere in the dissertation.

1:1 Now in the days when the judges judged, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem of Judah went to sojourn in the Fields of Moab: he and his wife and his two sons.

1:2 And the man's name was Elimelek and his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons' names were Mahlon and Kilyon; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem of Judah. And they came to the Fields of Moab and stayed there.

1:3 And Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died; and she remained with her two sons.

1:4 And they took Moabite wives for themselves: the first one's name was Orpah and the second one's name was Ruth. And they lived there about ten years.

1:5 But they died also--the two of them, Mahlon and Kilyon. So the woman survived her two sons and her husband.

1:6 And so she rose--she and her daughters-in-law, and she turned from the Fields of Moab; for she had heard in the Fields of Moab that the Lord had remembered his people and had given them bread.

1:7 And she went forth from the place where she had been--her two daughters-in-law with her--and they took the road to return to the land of Judah.

1:8 And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law: "Go, turn back, each to her mother's house. May the Lord deal with you kindly as you have dealt kindly with the dead and with me.

1:9 May the Lord grant that you may find security each in the house of her husband." And she kissed them. But they raised their voices and wept.

1:10 And they said to her, "No! With you shall we return to your people!"

1:11 But Naomi replied, "Turn back my daughters! Why go with me? Have I still sons in my womb who would be husbands for you?

1:12 Turn back, my daughters! Go! For I am too old to have a husband. For if I said, 'There is still hope for me,' even if I were to be with a husband tonight and bear sons,

1:13 would you wait[1] for them[2] until they were grown? Would you deprive yourselves of having a husband for them? No, my daughters; I have had greater bitterness than you, for the hand of the Lord has come forth against me."[3]

1:14 But they raised their voices and wept all the more. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

1:15 And she said, "Look! Your 'sister' has returned to her people and to her gods; turn back after your 'sister'!"

1:16 And Ruth said, "Do not press me to abandon returning after you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people and your God, my God.

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[1] This verse has several difficulties. According to E. F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1975), pp. 69-70 (hereafter cited as Campbell, *Ruth*), the verbs תְּשַׂבֵּרְנָה and תֵּעָגֵנָה are technical terms employed in a highly complex legal background. The latter is anomalous in form, whether a *niphal* of עגן or of עגו/י. It is also a *hapax legomenon*. The fact that it is used in a parallel construction and the translations given in the versions make the general meaning adequately clear.

[2] W. Rudolph, *Das Buch Ruth. Das Hohe Lied. Die Klaglieder* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1962), p. 40, reads a preposition and pronoun rather than a conjunction.

[3] The exact connotation of Naomi's words is not clear, though it is easy enough to understand her general feeling. I will indicate in my chapter 4 that the expression of anger at the deity may be more important than its precise content or referent.

1:17 Wherever you die I will die, and there will I be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me and thus add to it if even death[1] will separate me and you."

1:18 But when she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her.

1:19 And the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they reached Bethlehem all the city was astir over them, and the women said, "Could it be Naomi?"

1:20 And she replied to them, "Don't call me Naomi; call me Mara. For the Almighty has embittered me greatly.

1:21 For I went away full, but empty has the Lord returned me. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has pronounced sentence on me."

1:22 And so Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite woman, her daughter-in-law was with her, who had turned back from the Fields of Moab. And they happened[2] to come to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

2:1 Naomi had a friend[3] of her husband's--a man of worth from the clan of Elimelek, and his name was Boaz.

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[1] The phrase can be understood to mean "death alone will separate me from you" or "not even death will separate me from you." On the basis of my understanding of the story as the gradual triumph of life over death, I prefer the latter interpretation.

[2] Campbell, *Ruth*, p. 78 suggests that the וְהֵמָּה is more satisfactorily explained as an emphasizing particle, similar to וְהִנֵּה (and it so happened) than as a masculine pronoun referring to the two women, employed when the verb itself would have been adequate to convey the subject.

[3] The word is a substantive from the verb ידע (to know) and the meaning "acquaintance" would be a satisfactory translation. The context seems to require a warmer word, though not necessarily a legally more informative term. The written consonants are preferable to the suggested emandation on the basis of frequency of occurrence: J. M. Sasson, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 39 (hereafter cited as Sasson, *Ruth*).

2:2 And Ruth the Moabite woman said to Naomi, "I plan to go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone who looks upon me with favor."[1] And she replied to her, "Go, my daughter."

2:3 And she went on her way and arriving, gleaned in the field behind the harvesters; and then her luck brought her to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of Elimelek's clan.

2:4 And just then Boaz was coming from Bethlehem. And he said to the harvesters, "The Lord be with you." And they answered him, "May the Lord bless you."

2:5 And Boaz said to his overseer who was standing near the harvesters, "Who is this young woman?"[2]

2:6 And the overseer who was standing near the harvesters answered, saying, "A young Moabite woman. She is the one who returned with Naomi from the Fields of Moab.

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[1] There is no difficulty in understanding the general sense of Ruth's plan and execution of it in this chapter. More to call attention to the precision of the storyteller and to defend him or her against various suggestions of ignorance or carelessness, I will spell out my understanding. In v. 2 Ruth proposes a plan that is in general accord with laws such as Lev. 19:9, 23:22 and Dt. 24:19. In v. 3 she starts across the field which was divided among various persons, gleaning as she goes, and arriving by chance and not by intent at Boaz' portion. Prior to Boaz' arrival she makes a request of the overseer, a request he does not grant, referring it rather to Boaz, as we learn in v. 7. Boaz offers Ruth hospitality in his field--protection, drink and food (vv. 8, 9, 14). In vv. 15-16 he grants her original request and more besides.

[2] Boaz' question is more precisely: "'Whose is this young woman?'" or "'with whom is this young woman associated?'" Campbell, Ruth, pp. 93-94, notes that this question, like others in the story, is asked and answered in order to move the story along. He paraphrases the question to read: "'Where does this young woman fit in?'" It is not entirely clear from the context whether the question presumes a father, a husband, a master, a relative; some sort of a dependent relationship is clearly implied.

2:7 And she asked, 'I am going to glean, and I would (also) gather among the cut grain after the harvesters.' She came and has stood from that time in the morning until this present moment. She has only lived at home a short time."[1]

2:8 And Boaz said to Ruth, "Have you not heard, my daughter? Do not go to glean in another field, and neither cross over from this one. Stay right here close to my young women.[2]

2:9 Keep your eyes on the field which they are harvesting and go behind the women; have I not commanded the young men not to bother you? And if you are thirsty go to the vessels and drink of what the young men have drawn."

2:10 And she fell on her face and bowed to the earth and said to him, "How have I found favor in your eyes that you take note of me, though I am a foreigner?"

2:11 And Boaz answered her, saying, "They have certainly told me everything you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband--and that you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and went to a people which you did not know before that.

2:12 May the Lord repay you justly for your deed, and may your recompense be full with the Lord the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge."

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[1] The last few words of 2:7 are impossible to translate without alteration, and commentators provide many suggestions. Context suggests that the words should bear some relation to the fact that Ruth is standing there and that Boaz does not recognize her. The accentuation suggests that the זֶה (this) goes with the preceding word: C. Kuhn, "Ruth 2,7" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 46 (1928):79f., though the effect is still clumsy. The שִׁבְתָּה seems most appropriately derived from ישׁב (to dwell), the בַּיִת (home) to refer to Naomi's home which is now Ruth's. No translation is more than a good guess. The words are tantalizing but it is not crucial to understand them perfectly.

[2] There may or may not be a contradiction between Boaz' directions here, that Ruth should stay close by the women, and her words in 2:21, in which she quotes him as saying she is to stay close by the young men--or by the workers in general. What does not seem at all likely is that we are to see Ruth as somehow substantially altering Boaz' words to her.

2:13 And she replied, "Let me find favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have consoled me and you have spoken to the heart of your maidservant--though I am not like one of your maidservants."

2:14 And Boaz said to her at mealtime, "Draw near here and eat some food and dip your morsel into the wine sauce." And she sat by the side of the harvesters and he held out[1] some parched grain to her. And she ate and was satisfied and had some left over.

2:15 Then she rose to glean. And Boaz commanded his young men: "She may also glean between the heaps of fallen grain, and you are not to restrain her.

2:16 And even pull some out for her from the heaps and leave it for her to glean, and don't rebuke her."

2:17 And so she gleaned in the field until evening. And she beat out what she had gleaned and it was about an ephah of barley.[2]

2:18 And she lifted it up and came to the city. And her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave to her mother-in-law from what she had left over.

2:19 And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today and how did you do it? May the one who acknowledged you be blessed." And she related to her mother-in-law all she had done with him and then said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz."

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[1] The exact gesture is not clear. The Hebrew word, a *hapax legomenon*, may reflect the Ugaritic *mṣbṭm* (tongs), or the Akkadian *ṣabatu* (to grasp or seize). The Septuagint translates it by a word which suggests the Hebrew *צבר* (related to heaps): Campbell, *Ruth*, pp. 102-103. The general meaning is clear enough, but whatever nuances we might have been able to understand from the specific word are lost.

[2] Commentators disagree on the exact amount contained in an ephah but agree that the amount is substantial for Ruth's day of work.

2:20 And Naomi answered her daughter-in-law: "May he be blessed by the Lord who[1] has not abandoned his mercy with the living or with the dead!" And Naomi told her, "The man is related to us--he is one of our redeemers."

2:21 And Ruth the Moabite woman replied, "Besides that, he said to me, 'Stay close to the young people who are with me, until they finish the harvest of my property.'"

2:22 And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "That is good, my daughter. For if you go out with his young women, they will not be harrassing you in another field."

2:23 And so she stayed closed to the young women of Boaz, to glean until the completion of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And then she lived with her mother-in-law.

3:1 Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, am I not seeking security for you, so that all might be well for you?

3:2 And now is not Boaz, with whose young women you have been, a relative of ours? He just happens to be threshing the barley tonight.

3:3 So wash and anoint yourself and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor. Don't make your presence known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.

3:4 And when he is asleep find out the place where he is lying and come and uncover his legs and lie down. Then he will make known to you what you should do."

3:5 And she replied to her, "Everything you say I will do."

3:6 And she went down to the threshing floor and she did everything as her mother-in-law had ordered.

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[1] The referent of the *אֲשֶׁר* clause is not unambiguous. It could be either Boaz or the Lord. It seems preferable to me on the basis of the pattern of such blessings throughout the story to let the ambiguity underline the conformity between the actions of the Lord and those of worthy people such as Boaz, and the similarity between the actions referred to here and those of Ruth, mentioned in 1:8 and 3:10. In their acts of *hesed* the main characters resemble the Lord and one another as well.

3:7 And Boaz ate and drank and his heart was merry. And he came to sleep by the edge of the grain heap, and Ruth came quietly and uncovered his legs and lay down.

3:8 And in the middle of the night the man started and groped--and there was a woman lying at his feet.

3:9 And he asked, "Who are you?" And she replied, "I am Ruth, your handmaid. Spread your garment over your handmaid[1]--as you are a redeemer."

3:10 And he replied, "Blessed are you by the Lord, my daughter. You have made your latter kindness better than your former, by not going after men--rich or poor.

3:11 And now, my daughter, don't be afraid; everything you ask I will do for you, for the whole assembly of my people know that you are a woman of worth.

3:12 And now--though I am truly a redeemer--there is another redeemer nearer than I.

3:13 Stay here tonight, and in the morning if he will redeem you,[2] good--let him redeem; but if he does not wish to redeem you then I will do so myself--as the Lord lives. Sleep here till morning."

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[1] This verse is a most crucial one for my understanding of the story. It will be my contention that Ruth and Naomi and the storyteller are carefully distinguishing between the requests for marriage and redemption, and yet deliberately associating them here in order to both maintain suspense and keep us from guessing how the story will turn out. If this reading is correct, the כִּי must be somewhat less strong than its usual conjunctive sense of "because" or "for". Sasson, Ruth, pp. 81-82, suggests a corroborative sense of the word, citing W. Gesenius, E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, Hebrew Grammar (Oxford: University Press, 1910), #159, p. 498; #148d, p. 471.

[2] Only the full resolution of the story lets this promise of Boaz be seen clearly. He has already made a promise of marriage in 3:11; here he makes his commitment to act as redeemer should he be the appropriate one. The second person pronominal suffix is deliberately ambiguous--suggesting reference to Ruth here but will be seen to refer more generally to Naomi and to Elimelek's field in chapter 4.

3:14 So she slept by his side until the morning. And she rose before one person could recognize another. For he had said, "It should not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor."

3:15 And he said, "Hold out the shawl which is around you--get a good grip on it." And she held it firmly. He then measured six parts of barley[1] and placed it upon her. And he came up to the city.

3:16 And she came to her mother-in-law, who asked: "Who are you, my daughter?" And she related to her mother-in-law everything the man had done for her.

3:17 And she added, "These are the six parts of barley he gave me, for he said, 'You shall not go empty to your mother-in-law.'"

3:18 And she replied, "Rest here, my daughter, until you learn how the matter will fall out; for the man will not rest content until he brings the matter to completion today."

4:1 But Boaz went up to the gate and sat there. And just then the redeemer whom Boaz had spoken of was passing by. And he said, "Turn aside, sit here, 'So and So.'"

4:2 And he took ten men from the elders of the city, and said, "Sit here," and they sat down.

4:3 And he said to the redeemer, "The portion of the field which belongs to our brother Elimelek, Naomi, who has returned from the Fields of Moab, has decided to offer for sale.

4:4 And I said: 'I will uncover your ear, saying: "Acquire before the people sitting here and before the elders of my people: if you will redeem, redeem; if you will not redeem, tell me so that I will know, for there is no one except you to redeem, and I am after you."'" And he replied, "I will redeem."

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[1] Commentators generally agree that once again the amount is generous, whatever the reason for the gift.

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4:5 Then Boaz said, "On the day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, also[1] Ruth the Moabite woman, wife of the dead man *I*[2] will acquire--to raise the name of the dead man over his inheritance."

4:6 Then the redeemer said, "I am not able to redeem for myself, lest I destroy my inheritance. You redeem for yourself my redemption right, for I am not able to redeem."

4:7 Now this was formerly the custom in Israel regarding the redemption and regarding the exchange, to confirm any matter: a man would take off his sandal and give it to his associate. This was the way of witnessing in Israel.

4:8 And the redeemer said to Boaz, "Acquire for yourself," and he drew off his sandal.

4:9 And then Boaz said to the elders and all the people: "You are witnesses today that I have acquired everything that was Elimelek's and everything that was Kilyon and Mahlon's from the hand of Naomi;

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[1] The combination of letters preceding the name Ruth is a problem in relation to the rest of the sentence. If they are to be read as "and from the hand of Ruth," then there is no direct object in the sentence. Campbell, *Ruth*, p. 146, refers us to the verse below (v. 10) where a similar statement indicates that Ruth is the object acquired. He suggests that the letters וּמֵאֵת are best read as the conjunction "and" followed by an enclitic *mem* and the direct object marker. Other commentators (G. Gerleman, *Ruth*. *Das Hohelied* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1965), p. 35; P. Joüon, S.J., *Ruth*: *Commentaire Philologique et exégétique* (Rome: Institut Biblique Pontifical, 1953), p. 83; A. R. S. Kennedy, *The Book of Ruth, The Hebrew Text with Grammatical Notes and Vocabulary* (London: SPCK, 1928), p. 55; Rudolph, p. 59) prefer to see the letters וּמֵאֵת as reflecting וְגַם־אֶת (and also), with the *ghimel* having dropped out. In either case, Ruth is the direct object, not the object of the preposition "from".

[2] Reading the written consonants instead of the Masoretic pointing. The case will be made for this choice from the content of the story in chapter three of the dissertation.

4:10 and in addition, Ruth, the Moabite woman, wife of Mahlon, I have acquired for myself as a wife, to raise the name of the dead man over his inheritance--so that the name of the dead man will not be cut off from among his brethren and from the gate of this place. You are witnesses today."

4:11 And all the people who were in the gate and the elders replied, "We are witnesses! May the Lord grant[1] that the woman coming to your house be like Rachel and like Leah--the two of whom built the house of Israel; and may you be fruitful in Ephratah and maintain a name in Bethlehem.[2]

4:12 And may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah--from the seed which the Lord is giving you today from this young woman."

4:13 And Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife and he went into her; and the Lord gave her conception and she bore a son.

4:14 And the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord who did not let there cease to be a redeemer for you this day and his name be maintained in Israel.

4:15 And he shall be to you as a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age. For your daughter-in-law whom you love bore him--she who is better in your eyes than seven sons."

4:16 Then Naomi took the child and placed him in her bosom, and she became his nurse.

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[1] S. B. Parker, "The Marriage Blessing in Israelite and Ugaritic Literature," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976):23-30, makes a number of suggestions about the blessing contained in 4:11-12. Most germane to my purposes are his suggestions that the time and the form of the pronouncement as well as the fertility nuances of חיל (worth) and the reference to ancestors suggest a context of royalty.

[2] The exact meaning of "maintain a name" (also in 4:14) is disputed. Recognizing that the meaning is still not clear, I suspect that it is related to the expression about name in 4:5 and 10, both expressions being technical references to the processes concerning levirate and inheritance. Some further suggestions will be offered in chapter three of this dissertation.

4:17 And the neighbors pronounced his name, saying: "A son is born to Naomi!" And they called his name Obed, and he was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

4:18 So this is the genealogy of Perez: Perez begot Hezron;

4:19 and Hezron begot Ram; and Ram begot Aminadab;

4:20 and Aminadab begot Nashon; and Nashon begot Salmon;

4:21 and Salmon begot Boaz; and Boaz begot Obed;

4:22 and Obed begot Jesse; and Jesse begot David.

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CHAPTER II

INVESTIGATION OF RHETORICAL FEATURES OF THE STORY OF RUTH

Underlying the investigation of the rhetorical features of the story of Ruth is the assumption that these aspects of the text, the many specific stylistic devices by which the story makes its communication, are intrinsic and vital to the meaning of the story. They are part of the way in which the storyteller makes his or her intent available to the audience and part of the way in which the story itself speaks. If the seed-field is a basic symbol by which the story is unfolded and meaning is disclosed, then it should be possible to see evidence of it in the rhetorical aspects of the story. The aim of this chapter is to show such evidence, and to show how the rhetorical features cue us to the parts of the story most pregnant with meaning. For this purpose six rhetorical features are investigated in terms of their relationship to the seed-field symbol.

Structure

The first of these features is the surface structure[1] of the story. Though generally compatible with the content of the story, the structure is not so much an outline of the plot as a sort of frame, discernible primarily by the presence of literary techniques such as repetition, parallelism, ring composition, etc.[2] An investigation of the structure of the story of Ruth indicates an underlying pattern of symmetry. As befits a story whose imagery is of the world of nature, the story can be visualized as divided in half[1] by the pause between chapters 2 and 3, a pause needed for fruition of the plans begun. Each half has three sections which correspond: section C (2:1-23) corresponds to D (3:1-18); B (1:6-22) to E (4:1-17); A (1:1-5) to F (4:18-22).

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[1] The word "structure" is understood in a number of different ways in contemporary studies. My use of the term and the concept I have found to be most fruitful in my own investigation follows not the structuralist schools of thought, whose search is for the nature of the system underlying the event of a text (deep structure) beneath the surface, but a more classical literary understanding where the surface structure of a text is one of the ways in which the storyteller or writer makes the meaning of the text visible. For a further discussion of some of these distinctions see M. A. Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiple Interpretations* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 73.

[2] Few commentators express interest in the structure of the story, although most who give an outline of the narrative indicate an understanding that is generally compatible with the structure I propose. The only particularly controversial question is whether or not the last five verses are to be considered integral to the story. It is my understanding that they are, an opinion not held by the majority of commentators. Three writers who show considerable interest in the structure of Ruth are S. Bertman, "Symmetrical Design in the Book of Ruth," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1965): 165-168; K. K. Sacon, "The Book of Ruth--Its Literary Structure and Themes," *Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute* 4 (1978): 3-22; P. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), pp. 166-199.

In addition to the suitability of the structure to a natural element such as a seed, the structure also uses the balance of plan and compliance, initiative and resolution, lack and fulfillment to set up the expectation that the story will turn out well, that the problems with which it begins will be resolved by the resources provided by the storyteller.

The structure can also indicate relationships and significances that might not otherwise be so clear, and indicate what is to be viewed as most central to the story. The importance of the genealogy (section F) is no longer really debatable once we can see it--fulness of progeny--balanced with the prologue (section A)--diminishment of progeny. The centers of the ring composition of sections

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[1] Trible, p. 166 comments on the fact that the concerns of the third and fourth (main) scenes return to the concerns of the first two.

C and D are able to signal the importance of the material framed there: identity of Ruth as foreign, widowed, childless, dependent--but worthy--and the blessing of her by Boaz and by the Lord. The relation of these themes to the larger meaning of the story will become clearer later. Now it is sufficient to note that the material which focuses on who Ruth has been--where she is from, what she has experienced--and on who she becomes--and on how she will find rest, is what the story is all about. The identity and role of her benefactor is of equal importance. From the centers of structures C and D we see that her benefactor is Boaz and the Lord, identical on some levels of the story, though distinct on others; and we see that the tasks of the benefactor are protection: marriage and redemption. These roles are also focused by the centers of the central speeches of sections B and E. Ruth's new identity as bride is also referred to. The structures can also indicate which character roles are equivalent, a contribution whose significance will also be amply discussed later. Here it is sufficient to note that equivalent positions in the structure are held by Orpah and the unnamed redeemer, by the women of the town and the elders, by Naomi and Boaz and by Boaz and the Lord.

A brief summary and a sketch of the most general features of each pair of sections can indicate the validity of these contentions.

Sections C and D flank the midpoint in the story, which is a pause in the story's action, a period of time necessary for the fruition of the initiatives of the first half of the story. Each section is developed by a similar pattern of ring composition. The action of each section begins and concludes at Naomi's home with dialogue between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. As each section begins, one woman suggests a plan involving their kinsman to which the other assents. In the closing scene Ruth reports on the success of the venture and Naomi adds counsel. The more central part of each section details the meeting of Ruth and Boaz. Each bracketing part includes dialogue between them involving a request by Ruth and a response by Boaz, a gift of food, hospitality and blessing. Central to each section are questions and clarifications of Ruth's identity. The general relationship between these two sections may be seen schematically:

Section C: 2:1-23

-narrative note introduces a brief dialogue: plan of Ruth, compliance by Naomi; reference to Boaz; reference to fertility site;[1] (2:1-2)

    -narrative note of implementation of plan; journey to fertility site; pileup of verbs to describe action; (2:3)

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[1] Sacon, pp. 8-9, points out chiastic elements in these two verses.

  - central dialogue section: speech of Boaz to his workers; topic is Ruth and her request;[1] (2:4-7)
    - address by Boaz to Ruth; rhetorical questions expecting a positive response surround brief directive phrases; offer of hospitality (safety and liquid refreshment); (2:8-9)
      - response by Ruth: gesture and speech; question and positive disclaimer about her status; (2:10)
        - center of ring: response of Boaz; explanation to and commendation of Ruth; chiastic expression of blessing; (2:11-12)[2]
      - response of Ruth: question and negative disclaimer about her status; the expression "find favor in your eyes" marks an inclusion with the same expression in 2:10; (2:13)
    - address by Boaz to Ruth; brief directive phrases; offer of hospitality (food and comfort); (2:14)
  - end of central dialogue section; speech of Boaz to his workers; topic is Ruth and her request; two parallel permissions and two prohibitions; (2:15-16)
- narrative note of success of project; journey from fertility site; pileup of verbs; (2:17-18)

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[1] Campbell, Ruth, p. 94, points out the functional nature of this question (and the same can be said of its counterparts elsewhere). It is not so much a matter of our acquiring new information as it is of the question's being a necessary device to enable the story to move along. Repetition of such questions also serves to stress the issue of Ruth's identity.

[2] The parallelism and the chiastic elements are pointed out by Campbell, Ruth, pp. 98-99 and by Sacon, pp. 9-10. These scholars also point out at the same time wordplay, alliteration and assonance within these central lines.

-narrative note concludes a brief dialogue: gift of seed given, two questions by Naomi;[1] a double use of "blessed" frames Boaz' name;[2] counsel by Naomi; reference to Boaz; Ruth quotes Boaz; reference to fertility site; transition to the topic of the next section;[3] (2:19-23).[4]

Section D: 3:1-18

-no narrative introduction;[5] brief dialogue: plan of Naomi, compliance by Ruth; reference to Boaz; reference to fertility site; Naomi's speech opens with two parallel rhetorical questions expecting a positive response[6] (3:1-5)

-narrative note of implementation of plan; journey to fertility site; (3:6-8)

-(secrecy stress replaces dialogue between Boaz and others);

-central dialogue section: address of Boaz to Ruth; question regarding her identity; (3:9)

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[1] This parallelism is noted by Campbell, *Ruth*, p. 105 and by L. Morris "Ruth," in A. E. Cundall and L. Morris *Judges; [and] Ruth* (London: Tyndale Press, 1968), p. 280.

[2] Sacon, p. 10

[3] J. de Waard and E. A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Ruth* (London: United Bible Society, 1973), p. 45, suggest that the question of Ruth's home, mentioned in v. 23, is the problem the next chapter must resolve.

[4] W. Dommershausen, "Leitwortstil in der Ruthrolle," in *Theologie im Wandel* (Munich: Erich Wewel, 1967), pp. 398-402, indicates how certain words key to each section help indicate the units. Key words for this section are לקט (to glean), הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה (Moabite woman and מצא חֵן בְּעֵינָיו (find favor in someone's sight).

[5] Trible, p. 182, says this absence is suitable since the women are now in charge and any narrative caution must be dispelled.

[6] Campbell, *Ruth*, p. 116. He points out this equivalence in speech at 2:8-9 as one of the ways in which rhetorical features align Naomi and Boaz. The use of בִּתִּי (my daughter) serves the same purpose, as well as forming an inclusion between this element and its counterpart in 3:16-18. Some other chiastic elements united vv. 3-4 also.

-response of Ruth: identifies herself,[1] makes a request; (3:9)

-center of ring: response of Boaz; promise to and commendation of Ruth; chiastic offer of hospitality;[2] blessing; double comparative (latter, former; rich, poor); (3:10-13)

-response of Ruth: compliance; (3:14)

-end of central dialogue section: address by Boaz to Ruth, offer of food; reference to her identity; (3:14-15)

-(dialogue with others avoided)

-narrative note of success of project; journey from fertility site; (3:15)

-no narrative conclusion; gift of seed given, brief dialogue: question by Naomi, counsel by Naomi, reference to Boaz; Ruth quotes Boaz; (3:16-18).[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 123 suggests a relationship between Ruth's use of אָמָה (maidservant) here and שִׁפְחָה (handmaid) in the chiastically-related place in section C. He thinks part of this storyteller's artistry is in the use of such pairs of synonymns. Sasson, throughout his commentary, maintains that such words are not synonymns but carefully graded terms describing Ruth's status. Joüon, p. 73, suggests the word might have been chosen for its possibilities of assonance with כְּנָפָיו (his wings).

[2] Trible, p. 185.

[3] Dommershausen, pp. 403-404, points out that this section is united by the words גאל (to redeem), גֹּרן (threshing floor) and שׁכב (to sleep).

Sections B and E correspond to each other also. Each begins with the narration of a journey and with the initial compliance of others with the plans of the journeyer. The journey is interrupted by a speech section composed of three sets of dialogue, each with statements of directive and response. In both sections there is a character serving as a foil who makes an initial choice which must be renounced almost immediately, leaving the way clear for the heroine and hero to act appropriately. The journey resumes, with its ultimate result being commented upon by the women of the town to whom Naomi responds. A summary both concludes the action and provides transition to the next section. A chart conveniently shows this pair of sections:

Section B 1:6-22[1]

-narrative introduction; plan undertaken by Naomi; compliance of Orpah and Ruth; reference to the beginning of a journey; reference to fertility site; singular verbs make the focus of this introduction (and of the conclusion) Naomi;[2] chiastic elements unite these lines; (1:6-7)

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[1] Sacon, pp. 4 ff., and others include at least v. 6 if not also v. 7 with the initial section. A case can really be made for either division, since v. 6 as a sort of hinge adds something helpful to the structure of either part.

[2] Campbell, _Ruth_, p. 63.

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-main dialogue: topic is law or custom regarding marriage: 1:8-17

- -command of Naomi: ring arrangement:[1] two imperatives; two blessing statements each with two parts; reference to house marks inclusion; speech ends with a gesture; (1:8-9)

- -response of Orpah and Ruth: gesture,[2] words; both refuse to turn away; (1:9-10)

  - -fuller statement of Naomi: imperatives[3] followed by two rhetorical questions; imperative followed by reasons, followed by two rhetorical questions; general repetition and assonance tie this speech together;[4] (1:11-13)

  - -responses of Orpah--gesture and silence, concluded chiastically from 1:9-10--and of Ruth--stated in reverse order of Orpah's; (1:14)[5]

- -command of Naomi: makes use of parallel elements; (1:15)

- -response of Ruth: uses Naomi's words; makes a balanced, elliptical, parallel speech: two sets of paired verbal elements surround a pair of nominal elements;[6] formal language of invocation; (1:16-17)

-narrative: result; resumption of journey; (1:18-19)

-dialogue: speech of women; naming episode;
response of Naomi: complaint in two
chiastic statements; (1:20-21)

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[1] Trible, p. 169.

[2] Campbell, Ruth, pp. 71-72, points out the kiss as a bracket for the farewell scene.

[3] Joüon, p. 39, notes a chiasm of these two verbs with v. 8.

[4] Sacon, p. 5.

[5] Ibid, p. 5.

[6] Ibid, p. 6.

-summary and transition; ends with singular verbs;[1] (1:23).

Section E: 4:1-17

- narrative introduction; plan undertaken by Boaz;[2] compliance of unnamed man and elders; reference to the beginning of a journey; reference to a site that will affect fertility; the narrative can be seen to have chiastic elements; (4:1-2)
    - main dialogue: topic is law or custom regarding marriage: 4:3-12
        - statement of Boaz; v. 3 is expressed chiastically; v. 4 is set up in a balanced fashion; (4:3-4)
        - response of unnamed redeemer: compliance, expressed laconically; (4:4)
        - fuller statement of Boaz: expressed chiastically;[3] (4:5)
        - response of unnamed redeemer: declines by word and by gesture; his speech is chiastic;[4] (4:6-8)
    - statement of Boaz: framed by his address to witnesses, his pronouncement of the proceedings is articulated in two pairs of statements;[5] (4:9-10)

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[1] Dommershausen, p. 396, informs us that the *Leitwort* for this chapter is שוב (to return).

[2] In sections B and E, Naomi and Boaz have parallel positions in at least the early part of the structure.

[3] Trible, p. 188.

[4] Campbell, *Ruth*, p. 149; Trible, p. 189. Campbell also points out vowel assonance in the verse's technical terminology.

[5] Sasson, *Ruth*, p. 148. Sacon prefers to see this whole set of verses from 5-11 be a block. His schema, p. 16, is attractive, but I prefer to leave the relationship to section B clear, a concern he does not seem to share.

-response of witnesses: use of Boaz' words; they make a balanced, parallel statement of blessing in three parts; formal language of invocation; blessing knit by reference to the Lord, to the woman, to house;[1] order of names reversed from 4:9; (4:11-12)

-narrative: result; resumption of journey; pileup of verbs; (4:13)

-dialogue: speech of women; naming episode; response of Naomi: gesture implies blessing; (4:14-15)

-summary and transition; (4:17).[2]

Sections A and F are both characterized by rapid pace of narration and passage of time, by spare narrative, by repetition, by concern with family history[3] (diminishment of heirs in A, steady line of heirs in F). Each section lists ten names in order to make its presentation of family history. Discussing genealogies,[4] J. M. Sasson points out that when such lists occur in sets of ten names, often the important positions are seven and ten. If that is true, the important names in section A are Ruth and Naomi; in section F Boaz and David are featured.[5]

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[1] Trible, p. 191.

[2] Dommershausen, pp. 405-406, lists the key words as שער (gate), גאל (to redeem), קנה (to acquire).

[3] Bertman, p. 167.

[4] J. M. Sasson, "Generation, seventh," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976): 354-356.

[5] The names in section A, however, are clearly not a genealogy in the classical sense.

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Repetition

Investigation of various patterns of repetition also supports the hypothesis about the centrality of seed-field symbolism. Alter calls attention to the significance of the combination of spare narrative and high percentage of repetition in the Old Testament, a combination which suggests the importance of repetition and its various capacities for communication.[1]

A simple count of recurring vocabulary suggests the dominance of nature imagery. Words used most frequently are agricultural or land words: *אכל* (to eat), *ישׁב* (to dwell), *לקט* (to glean), *מות* (to die), *קצר* (to harvest), *שָׂדֶה* (field), *שְׂעֹרִים* (barley); kinship or social terms: *אִישׁ* and *אִשָּׁה* (man and woman), *בַּית* (house), *בֵּן* and *בַּת* (son and daughter), *גאל* (to redeem), *חָמוֹת* (mother-in-law), *כַּלָּה* (daughter-in-law), *נַעַר* and *נַעֲרָה* (young man and young woman), *עָם* (people), *קרא* (to name), *שֵׁם* (name); or words with overtones related to fertility: *בוא* (to come), *ידע* (to know), *קנה* (to acquire), *שׁוב* (to return), *שׁכב* (to sleep).

W. Dommershausen's contribution to the discussion on vocabulary in Ruth is not only to indicate which words are most important to the story but to point out in addition that the *Leitwörte* are generally confined to their own section, though a stray occurrence or two might have been seeded in the previous section[1] or remain in the subsequent section.[2] The Leitwörte he suggests are all related to fertility.[3]

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[1] Alter, "Biblical Narrative," p. 63.

The continual repetition of Ruth's epithet contributes to the suggestion that she is somehow related to the land. The frequent use of kinship terminology--particularly Naomi's--reminds us that the mother-in-law has a responsibility to the daughter-in-law.[4] The repetition of Boaz' relationship with Elimelek is mentioned twice within three verses (2:1,3) probably again to encourage the audience to begin speculating on the possibilities.[5]

Repetition of key words or phrases also serves a purpose already noted in the section on structures--that of equating one character with another. For example, the fact that

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[1] E.g., בנים (sons) in section A is key in section B; קצר (to harvest) in B seeds C; גאל (to redeem) in C seeds D; ידע (to know) in D seeds E; ילד (to procreate, bear) in E seeds F.

[2] Dommershausen, *passim*.

[3] Sacon, pp. 3-18, among others, minimizes the importance of this observation by Dommershausen, maintaining that some of the words are only peripheral to major themes. I cannot see which of the words are peripheral, and even if some were, their value as meaning-indicators might not be lessened thereby.

[4] R. Alter, "A Literary Approach to the Bible," *Commentary* 60 (1975): 75, suggests this function in his analysis of Judah and Tamar (hereafter cited as Alter, "Literary Approach").

[5] Morris, p. 271.

Naomi and Boaz share a concern for Ruth's safety (2:8,9,15,16, 21,22) and address her as "my daughter" (2:8,22; 3:1,16,18) tend to suggest their equivalence. Naomi's condition of being past bearing is clear from her own words (1:11-13). Boaz' speech is described as turgid and repetitive, suggesting that he, too, might be elderly.[1] The effect of this equivalence is to cause us to wonder whether Boaz will be able to participate fully in the return of fruitfulness to Elimelek's family.

Ruth, by contrast, seems to belong to another generation. The effect of her being addressed as daughter, the concern of her elders to group her with the young people (chapter 2), and even the witnesses' reference to her as a young woman (4:12) might suggest she is not destined to be married to Boaz. However, a counter-suggestion is made by the storyteller when both Ruth and Boaz are characterized by the same epithet of worth (2:1; 3:11)[2] and when they speak in the same way (3:5,11), when they are called "the man" and "the woman" in chapter 3.

The significance of Ruth and Naomi's separation and union will be commented upon in chapter four of this paper. Here the rhetorical articulation of it can be seen in Ruth's

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[1] Campbell suggests this interpretation several times, e.g., *Ruth*, pp. 97, 107, 110, 116, 127.

[2] Ibid., pp. 124-125; Sasson, *Ruth*, p. 88.

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movement from Naomi and back again in chapters 2 and 3, in the terminology which unites the women in a kinship bond, and by the gentilic so frequently applied to Ruth, which seems to serve as counterpoint to the close relationship.[1]

Wordplay

Another rhetorical device which is used effectively to focus the audience upon fertility themes is wordplay. Wordplay is designed to catch the ear of the audience and to engage interest in and invite speculation upon the various possibilities latent in the expression used.[2] Once again it is evident that such a device is not merely an extra flourish but is a true if sophisticated indicator of meaning. The wordplays do not necessarily depend on correct linguistic analysis; in fact, often a general similarity of root consonants suffices.[3] A few examples of different kinds of wordplay serve to strengthen the impression that rhetorical features are very much seed-oriented.

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[1] Trible, p. 172.

[2] J. M. Sasson, "Wordplay in the Old Testament," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976): 968 (hereafter cited as Sasson, "Wordplay").

[3] J. Barr, "Etymology and the Old Testament," Oudtestamentische Studiën 19 (1974): 26.

Virtually all commentators--even if they indicate no other interest in imagery--discuss the possibility that the names of the characters are intended as wordplays.[1] It is possible to account for the names in terms of the interpretation I am proposing. Elimelek (my God is king) makes sense in the story of David's ancestors.[2] Naomi's name and the one by which she names herself trace the journey of her condition from pleasant and delightful to bitter and back again. If Kilyon's name can be seen as related to the Hebrew word for finished or spent, perhaps Mahlon's name, whose arrangement of root letters is not attested elsewhere in Biblical Hebrew, is derived from the Hebrew חלה (sickness) or from other Ancient Near Eastern words connoting sterility or weakness.[3] Sasson suggests that Mahlon may also be a wordplay on נַחֲלָה (inheritance).[4] If so, perhaps Kilyon is related in a similar way to כלה (to complete), used for the harvest in

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[1] Ibid., p. 25 points out that it is mostly proper names that are the subject of etymological speculation within the Old Testament itself. Since the story of Ruth makes only one explicit speculation, it is left up to us, the audience, to decide how to interpret the names. With Naomi beckoning to us by her words of 1:20, and given the general fulness of artistic elements in the story, it seems legitimate and promising to speculate.

[2] P. Humbert, "Art et leçon de l'histoire de Ruth," *Revue de théologie et philosophie* (N.S. 26, 1938): 285, finds it ironic; J. J. Slotki, "Ruth: Introduction and Commentary," in *The Five Megilloth: Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary*, ed. A Cohen (Hindhead, Surrey: Soncino Press, 1952), p. 42, thinks it indicates arrogance on the part of the bearer of the name.

[3] Sasson, *Ruth*, p. 18. [4] Ibid., p. 150.

2:21 and for eating and drinking in 3:3.

Orpah is usually understood to be suitable for her who turned her back (*עֹרֶף*, back of the neck) though perhaps better would be the meaning from Akkadian and Ugaritic, cloud.[1] Ruth's name is a puzzle, though the root *רוה* (to be sated) seems etymologically and semantically the most satisfactory,[2] as will become clear. There is no clear etymology for Boaz' name, though commentators have long seen the possibility of reference to strength. Humbert draws upon this understanding when he suggests that Boaz is the opposite of the males portrayed in chapter 1.[3] If the names are to be meaningful then it seems that they all should be understandable. There must be a reason why the unnamed redeemer remains unnamed.[4] Several scholars[5] suggest that he remains nameless ironically, since he refuses to raise up the name of the dead.[6] There is relatively little speculation on how Obed's name fits in, though it is most appropriate for the Exodus undertones I will

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[1] Campbell, *Ruth*, p. 55. [2] Sasson, *Ruth*, pp. 20-21.

[3] Humbert, p. 266.

[4] Sasson, *Ruth*, p. 107, says a skillful storyteller ought to avoid saturating the narrative with unnecessary names. Such an explanation is not adequate. In the first place, there are only eight names--hardly a satiety; and secondly, to leave just one of the actors without a name in a story where others' names are significant serves to call attention to him (and it) all the more.

[5] Most recently Trible, p. 190.

[6] I will make one other rather far-fetched suggestion when his role is discussed *vis-a-vis* that of Hades in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*.

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discuss in chapter five of this paper.

Other wordplay patterns are also suggestive. Throughout the story runs a series of wordplays on בֵּת (house), בַּת (daughter), בֵּת־לֶחֶם (house of food, Bethlehem). There are some instances where a functional word seems carefully planned to call special attention to a semantically more significant word: אֵיפֹה (where, 2:19) emphasizes אֵיפָה (measure gleaned, 2:17); מַדּוּעַ (why, 2:10) rings מוֹדַע (friend, kinsman, 2:1, 3:1) and ידע (to know, *passim*). Sometimes the words played upon are of equal importance: אָמָה (handmaid, 3:9) and אֹמֶנֶת (nurse, 4:16); גאל (to redeem, *passim*) and גלה (to uncover, 3:4,7;4:4); שִׁפְחָה (maidservant, 2:13) and מִשְׁפָּחָה (clan, 2:1,3). All of these wordplays invite a search for meaning which is accessible but not readily apparent;[1] they serve to emphasize the main questions with which the story is concerned: knowledge, redemption, role and identity of Ruth.

Chiasm and Inclusion

The effect of ring composition, which usually includes chiasm and inclusion, has already been commented upon and illustrated within the structures of the sections A-F. Such devices also bridge larger distances in the story of Ruth and sustain the seed-field themes throughout the work as a whole, as well as within the sections. A couple of long-range examples of each will suffice to demonstrate the contention.

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[1] Sasson, "Wordplay," p. 968.

One example of overarching chiasm is the reference to Mahlon and Kilyon (1:2) and that to Kilyon and Mahlon (4:9). In addition to stressing whatever semantic relation the names bear in the rest of the story, the chiasm also preserves the probability of a surprise about the identity of Ruth's husband and then invites speculation about Mahlon and his נַחֲלָה (inheritance). A second example, also concerned about the alternation of life and death, is spoken by Naomi, who blesses her daughters-in-law for their kindness "to the dead and to me" in 1:8 and in 2:20 blesses the Lord and Boaz for kindness "to the living and to the dead."

Examples of long-range inclusion, which emphasize fertility and exodus themes, are the use of רֵיקָם (empty): Naomi uses the word to describe her return in 1:21; Boaz plays on the concept to describe Ruth's return to Naomi (not empty) in 3:17. In each case it is evident that seed is the subject: lacking to Naomi after the death of her husband and sons, given to her in the person of her daughter-in-law and ultimately from Boaz by the story's end. Not to depart empty-handed is an important part of directions for the flight from Egypt. Similar nuances can be found in use of יֶלֶד (boy, 1:5) to refer to the dead sons of Naomi and וַתֵּלֶד (she bore, 4:13), הַיֶּלֶד (a son, 4:16), יֻלַּד (is born, 4:17). The inclusion reaching from כְּנָפָיו (the Lord's wings, 2:12) to כְּנָפֶךָ (your garment, 3:9) is important to equate divine and human kindness, to stretch the nuances of Ruth's request from protection to marriage, and to allow the gratuitous and excessive nature of the Lord's kindness to encourage Ruth to request something rather excessive (marriage) from a redeemer.

Explanatory Notes

This particular narrative device is seldom used by the storyteller, unlike most of his rhetorical devices, which are used quite frequently. To examine briefly two examples of this feature will increase our awareness of the seed symbol.

Comments by the narrator function to lessen for the audience the emotional impact that the same general information would have were it communicated by dialogue.[1] Assuming that the narrator is omniscient and reliable, we are given the opportunity to reflect upon his information rather than have to infer it ourselves.[2] In 1:6 the storyteller provides for us in a straight-forward but unobtrusive way a piece of information which on one level could effectively eliminate tension for the rest of the story. The seed has returned to the land, we are told. Once we can see the way in which the return of seed is the basic theme of the story, the announcement of its accomplishment in the agricultural sphere invites us to watch its reappearance on other levels. The attribution of the agency to the Lord in 1:6 is balanced by a similar attribution in the return of human seed (4:13). The Lord is the one who restores.

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[1] S. Bar-Efrat, "Literary Modes and Methods in the Biblical Narrative," Immanuel 8 (1978): 21.

[2] Ibid., pp. 20-21.

An opposite effect is achieved by the narrator's note in 4:7. The scene in which it comes is the climax [illegible] the story. Dismissing on the basis of the skill of the storyteller the possibility that the explanation of the custom is a clumsy distraction, we can examine other effects it may have. The first one is to draw out the suspense of the scene:[1] we continue to anticipate the dénouement of the story as we listen to the explanation of the gesture by which it will be legalized. Another possibility is suggested by a discussion of Nagler on ornamentation in oral narrative literature:[2] the seeming inappositeness of the lines may invite us to look more deeply for a hidden compatibility. The storyteller's pausing to clarify the gesture almost compels us to focus on the gesture itself--in this case the removal of a sandal. Once we have done so, it is likely that we will speculate on the relationship between the uncovering of the foot here and Ruth's uncovering of Boaz' feet or legs in chapter 3. By each gesture marriage is contracted and the lack of seed is remedied.

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[1] Campbell, "The Hebrew Short Story: A Study of Ruth," in A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers, ed. H. N. Bream, R. D. Heim, C. A. Moore (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), p. 93

[2] M. N. Nagler, "Polyphemus, Grendel and Ravana: A Study of 'Ornamentation' and the Generic in Oral Poetry," (unpublished), p. 5.

Irony

The last rhetorical device to be examined in terms of its sustaining the symbol of seed in the story of Ruth is irony. As has been true elsewhere, the purpose of the examination is not to be complete but to indicate a general prevalence of fertility themes throughout the rhetorical features of the story.

Irony results from a disparity in the understanding among characters, narrator and audience.[1] The disparity is the source of the impact:[2] perceiving it from our vantage point, we are called to think about the significance of the incongruity and to understand the fuller truth rather than just the literal plausibility of what is said.[3]

One way in which the story of Ruth conveys irony is by use of rhetorical questions. Naomi is the character who uses them with such effect. In her speech of 1:11-13 the suggestion that an old woman take steps to conceive sons who would be husbands for women already marriageable is ironic. The irony stems from the fact that her conceiving sons was indeed once the source of husbands for these women, from the fact that her solution would result in their being too old to bear by the time they were married (her present position) and from the understanding that will grow in us as the story progresses--that it is her husband and sons who will be the source of a husband for Ruth. Her speech may refer to Tamar's situation,[1] inviting us to wonder if the resolution to the "lack of husbands" problem lies here. There is irony in Naomi's question of 1:20-21, when she, having safely returned from a famine-induced exile to her land where food has been given, asks why her name is called "Pleasant One." Again, as our awareness grows we perceive first the incongruity of her bitterness, and then the larger overtones contributing to it.

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[1] Scholes and Kellogg, p. 240.

[2] E. M. Good, Irony in the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 19.

[3] Ibid., p. 22.

Two other statements of Naomi are ironic. In the speech 1:11-13 she invokes the deity who dealt harshly with her to deal kindly with her daughters;[2] then to the women in 1:20-21 she lodges a complaint against the Lord who returned her "empty" in the presence of the companion who will be the one to fill her. The function of Naomi's ironic comments is to cause us to reflect upon the relationship between her affliction and that of the land, between death at the hands of the Lord and the return of plenty from that same hand. Naomi's irony is also the first introduction we receive to the manner in which the story's problems will actually be resolved.

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[1] It undoubtedly does, in view of 4:12 ff.

[2] Trible, p. 170.

Conclusion

The rhetorical aspects of the story then are not mere decoration but are a myriad of invitations to understanding. Their heavy emphasis on seed-field imagery is our invitation to look more deeply into the story to see if the symbol continues to disclose reality to us. They also mark for us the places where we can look for the depth of meaning available.

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CHAPTER III

INVESTIGATION OF CONTENT OF THE STORY OF RUTH

The content of the story of Ruth--temporal and spatial elements, plot structure, character relationships--provides the next opportunity to validate the hypothesis that the seed-field is the central symbol of the story and to understand its workings more fully. Analysis of the content in terms of such imagery opens a broad approach to the story's meaning.

Temporal Elements

The centrality of agricultural imagery to the temporal references in the story can be shown in three ways. The allusions suggested by the story's time notations, the frames they provide, and their contribution to plot progression all serve to release the power of the underlying symbol.

The roots of the stock whose scion will be the king go back to times remote from the monarchy--to the period of the judges (1:1) and to the time of the patriarchs (4:18). The nuances suggested by these two references include lack of law, crises in stability and leadership, periods of external threat to the land. The seed planted in such times, though, produces the king whose heart is like that of his Lord, with whose reign are associated the glories of dynasty and temple and rest for the land from external enemies.[1] The story's beginning in exile and return suggests also the seventy who went down to Egypt and came out thousands strong, the patriarch Jacob who fled alone to the east and returned with wives, children, and wealth, the journeys of the eventually fruitful Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah. The story's harvest time setting recalls the commissioning of Gideon as liberator of his people and the return of the Ark of God to Beth Shemesh. The decisive events at midnight evoke associations of the slaying of the Egyptians prior to the Exodus.

The frames provided by various time references also permit the fertility overtones of the story to emerge. The story arches from famine to fruitfulness (1:1, 4:22), from death to life (1:3, 4:22), from judges to kings (1:1, 4:22), thus setting up and then resolving the key problems of the story: lack of food, lack of husbands, lack of redeemer, lack of heirs. A ten-year period contains famine, exile,

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[1] A question asked more frequently in commentaries concerns the facticity of the story: does the narrative truly recount the story of David's forebears? E.g., Joüon, p. 2; Rudolph, p. 29; A. Anderson, "The Marriage of Ruth," Journal of Semitic Studies 23 (1978): 172.

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death and infertility (1:1-5);[1] the limited time of harvest reverses them (1:6-4:22).[2] The day--morning through the common meal to evening--is the frame for Ruth's first approach to Boaz and for his first kindness to her (2:1-23); the night--evening through midnight to dawn--is the time in which her initiatives and his response blossom into commitment (3:1-18). Ruth's journey, begun from Moab with female companionship (1:6), is completed when her husband comes to her and she bears a son (4:13). Each of these frames emphasizes a time from death through a period of waiting to plenitude--thus suggesting, drawing upon, and participating in the cycle of nature from death and decay through a time of germination to the return of life. The fact that the cycles move unevenly (for example, food returns early in the story; the lack of a husband is remedied past the midpoint; the lack of a redeemer is not resolved until close to the story's end, etc.) adds texture and tension to the basic question of whether and how life will return.

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[1] It is not entirely clear whether ten years covers the entire sojourn of Naomi in Bethlehem or just the period from her sons' marriages. In either case the emphasis is on the length of the stay.

[2] L. Alonso-Schökel, S.J. "Narrative Structures in the Book of Judith," Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, Protocol of the 11th Colloquy (1974): 6, shows a similar technique used in the story of Judith, where God must act within a five-day limit.

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A third way in which temporal imagery contributes to the fertility understanding of the story can be best shown by exploring some of the individual references. Chapters 2 and 3 provide the best examples. Besides depending upon the harvest overtones--a time of celebration of the earth's fertility and of the favor of the land[1] but also a time of potential crisis during which the next year's supply of food must be secured--[2] the chapters utilize specific and contrasting time references to suggest the alternation needed for the germination of seed. Chapter 2 unfolds from morning to evening. Ruth and Boaz are framed by the light of day and are surrounded by other people through whom much of their exchange with each other needs to pass: Ruth's request of Boaz is made through the overseer; Boaz' response to her is made through his workers. The scene which balances this one moves from evening through the night until the break of day. Secrecy, surprise and disguise are the important factors: Ruth approaches quietly, Boaz gropes and questions, Ruth steals away before daylight.[3] Non-recognition is high-lighted. Privacy is complete: Ruth and Boaz speak to each other without intermediaries. The effect is to set up through opposites a totality of time which must elapse before the plans of these people will come to fruition.

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[1] D. F. Rauber, "Literary Values in the Bible: The Book of Ruth," Journal of Biblical Literature 89 (1970): 30-31 (hereafter cited as Rauber, "Values").

[2] H. Gunkel, Reden und Aufsätze (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), p. 71.

[3] Campbell, Ruth, pp. 130-131.

The first and fourth chapters can provide two additional examples of how times of fertility are key to the story. The first of these is reflected in Naomi's speech in 1:11-13: time is against her producing husbands for Ruth and Orpah as she did once before. She is too old to conceive, such sons would take too long to grow up, the women would not want to wait spouseless for so long. Time precludes that solution. But the rapid pace of narration of events in 4:13 indicates the fruitful result when the timing is right: marriage, procreation, conception and birth quickly resolve the remaining problems of the story.

Such examples help show that time references are not unimportant to the story but actually help to reinforce the fertility aspects of the story in a number of subtle ways.

Spatial Elements

The same general categories--allusions suggested, general settings established, and specific contributions of particular locales--can also serve to illustrate the contribution of spatial elements to the fertility interpretation of Ruth.

The proper place names in the story, Bethlehem and the Fields of Moab, are both suggestive of seed-field symbolism. Bethlehem, quite consistently associated with David and hence an obvious setting for the story of his ancestors, also

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connotes food (לֶחֶם) and house/dynasty (בֵת). The connotations of Fields of Moab are less obvious but also more intriguing. It may be that the journey from there alludes to the journey from Egypt to the promised land, to the Moabite threat against the land in the time of Ehud and Eglon, to the military exploits of David. It is also possible that the story of Moab's conception by Lot is intended to add insight to the story of Ruth.[1] I suspect that the Fields of Moab may function most effectively in relation to other fields which are crucial in the story: the field of Boaz and the field of Elimelek. The gentilic is used frequently for Ruth's epithet, contributing to the continual reinforcement of the fact that Ruth is a foreign woman--a fact whose significance for fertility will be developed later.

A second function of locations in the story is to provide a suitable general setting in which the narrative can unfold. The town of Bethlehem and the stages of journey are two such general settings. Bethlehem serves as the site for virtually all the action of the story (excepting only 1:2-5). It is, ironically, the place of famine from which a family departs; it is the place to which Naomi returns, paradoxically alone, though accompanied by her daughter-in-law; and it is the place to which Ruth returns, anomalously, since she had never been there before. It shares in the alternation between life and death, famine and plenty. It provides first food (לֶחֶם) and eventually a dynasty (בת). The story of Ruth is the recital of her finding a home (בת), a quest not completed until Boaz takes her to his home. Bethlehem enfolds the fertility sites of field, threshing floor and city gate.

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[1] C. M. Carmichael, "A Ceremonial Crux: Removing A Man's Sandal as a Female Gesture of Contempt," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 335.

The other general setting of the narrative is the journey. On a more psychological than literal level, the journey can suggest growth, change, instability, adventure--a large number of possibilities of the human condition--all contributing to its power as an image. The journey is a narrative technique allowing for meetings, for cross-fertilization that would not ordinarily occur.[1] The process of journeying is almost always difficult--hence the possibilities of fear, surprise, anger, depression, exaltation--but the result is ultimately life-nourishing. Difficult circumstances are conducive to growth and strengthening. The most obvious journey of the story is Naomi's flight from the famine in Bethlehem to the Fields of Moab and back to Bethlehem--a journey emphasized in the irony of Naomi's description of herself as leaving full and returning empty. More subtle and more baffling is Ruth's journey. Ruth leaves her homeland and is said to *return* to a place she had not previously inhabited. Just as Naomi's irony regarding her ability to produce husbands for Ruth and Orpah had the effect of inviting us to understand whether and how such a fertilization could occur, Ruth's return focuses for us the rather drawn out process and the various aspects of her journey home. The storyteller makes it clear that Ruth has rejected her Moabite home in order to go with her "mother" to Bethlehem. That her home is with Naomi is also stressed by the little journeys of chapters 2 and 3, where Ruth twice leaves from Naomi's house and returns there later. However, Ruth will not really be home, not fully "returned," until she finds a husband's home--and this, appropriately, is the quest upon which she is (indirectly in chapter 2, more directly in chapter 3) engaged in her travels to and from the field and threshing floor. The journey of Boaz in chapter 4--first to the city gate and ultimately his coming to Ruth in marriage--completes her journey as well. The fuller fertility implications of the homecoming of the foreign woman will be detailed later.

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[1] E. Robertson, "The Plot of the Book of Ruth," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 32 (1950): 208-209.

Consideration of some of the specific locations which the story uses will also show the importance of the contribution of the seed and field to the story. Three sites that are particularly important are the city gate, the threshing floor and the field. Each not only contributes to the plot of the story but stands for more than its geographic reality[1] and hence contributes associations and suggests relationships that broaden the story.[2]

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[1] L. Thompson, p. 34.

[2] Ibid., pp. 56-57.

The main emphasis in chapter 4 is on the scene at the city gate. From other biblical contexts it seems that the gate is both a commercial and a legal setting.[1] The story of Ruth has moved from the harvest of seed to the site of its threshing and finally here to the site of exchange. The gate is the setting where all the fertility concerns of the story are gathered: the land issues, the marriage issues, the redeemer issues and the heir issues are all determined at the setting that, though part of the life cycle, is also able to give legal stability to concerns arbitrated there.[2]

The fertility overtones of the threshing floor and the field are much more obvious. The threshing floor is associated with the harvest, naturally, with feasting, and also with sexual activity (Hos. 9:1). David's purchase of the threshing floor of Araunah (2 Sam. 24:18-25) for a

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[1] Morris, p. 297, lists references to judgment taking place at the city gate: Deut. 22:15 (English version); 2 Sam. 15:2 (English version); 1 Kgs. 22:10; Jer. 38:7; Lam. 5:14 (English version); Ps. 127:5; Prov. 22:22.

[2] Campbell, Ruth, pp. 118-119, cites several scriptural references and also archeological reports in an effort to build a case for the proximity of the threshing floor to the city gates. I find it difficult to be persuaded by his evidence, but I would maintain from the evidence of the artistry of this storyteller and from the consistent use of nature imagery that it is quite possible that the city gate had some fertility associations that are no longer clear. The levirate resolution to Tamar's barrenness also occurs near a town gate (Gen. 38:14).

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temple site also connects it with house imagery.[1] All these associations can be maintained without endorsing any of the more adverturesome theories about the story of Ruth being a reflection of a Bethlehem fertility cult.[2] Of course the threshing floor, the stealthy approach of the woman to the sleeping man, his sensuous euphoria and the darkness--not to mention (yet) the words and actions of Ruth--all unite to present a very suggestive scene for the audience to consider.[3] The threshing floor is a seed-related site as well as being another locale to which the main concerns of the story are brought.

The field is probably the main fertility setting of the story. There are three fields mentioned--a tripling that suggests the item is being stressed. The first field, the Fields of Moab, has already been seen as functioning to emphasize Ruth's foreignness and to call attention to the

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[1] J. F. X. Sheehan, S.J., The Threshing Floor: An Interpretation of the Old Testament (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), p. 36 (hereafter cited as Sheehan, Threshing Floor).

[2] E.g., H. G. May, "Ruth's Visit to the High Place at Bethlehem," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (1939): 75-78; S. L. Shearman and J. B. Curtis, "Divine-Human Conflicts in the Old Testament," Journal of Near Eastern Studies 28 (1969); 231-242; Sheehan, Threshing Floor; J. F. X. Sheehan, S.J., "The Word of God as Myth: The Book of Ruth" in The Word in the World, eds. R. B. Clifford and G. W. MacRae (Cambridge, Mass.: Weston College Press, 1973): 35-46; W. E. Staples, "The Book of Ruth," American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature 53 (1937): 145-157.

[3] For interpreters to minimize all sexual imagery (often on the basis of their own moral presuppositions and value judgments) is as damaging to the understanding of the story as to assign Ruth the role of the goddess Inanna or Ishtar (as Shearman and Curtis do, p. 240, and as Staples does, p. 155).

the anomaly of her return. It also serves to equate her with the land--the field. The second field, Boaz' portion, provides immediate food for the two women and will eventually produce aid for their other needs as well. Ruth comes to Boaz' field, spends the day gathering food there, eats and drinks there and bows to the very ground--an excessive gesture in the opinion of some[1] but which actually is one more way of equating her with the field. Boaz' field is also an expression of his fertility, the symbolic indication that he will be able to produce seed to solve the problems of infertility.

The third field, Elimelek's, not introduced until 4:3, is more difficult to interpret. There are legal questions[2] and literary questions.[3] The legal questions cannot be

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[1] Sasson, Ruth, p. 51.

[2] E.g.: How did Naomi get the field: by inheritance from her husband? from her sons? Could wives or mothers inherit? How could Naomi let Ruth glean if they really had a field? Had Naomi already sold the field (as the perfect tense of the verb might suggest)? Or perhaps did Elimelek sell the field before he left for Moab? Is Naomi here disposing of the redemption right to the field, rather than of the field itself? Why didn't the redeemers act earlier? Were they at fault not to do so? Etc. The discussion of these questions proposes larger questions about the relationship of legal practice to non-juridical genres and about criteria by which we may interpret the materials of scripture--questions I will address under the topic of the levirate.

[3] E.g.: Why is the field introduced so suddenly? Is it simply poor storytelling technique? Is it grounds for deciding that Boaz and Naomi must have met after all (Campbell, Ruth, pp. 18-19, calls our attention to the fact that the story never relates a meeting between these two main characters!) or that Boaz is bluffing? I will suggest a factor in chapter five of this paper which will clarify this puzzle.

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answered with any degree of certainty. We must simply accept the absence of any extant Old Testament example of a wife or mother inheriting;[1] in fact, the story refers to the field as Elimelek's, perhaps for that very reason. The story is clear in stating that the field is what is purchased, and it is purchased from Naomi.[2] Though Naomi holds the field, Ruth is still able to glean. The storyteller gives no indication that anyone acts in opposition to the law and no basis from which to infer it--quite the contrary. Part of the difficulty giving rise to the literary questions is that up until this point the storyteller has kept us, the audience, rather well-informed. We are kept pretty much abreast of what happens, and in fact we sometimes know certain things before the characters do.[3] In this case, we are as surprised as anyone at the gate (perhaps more so) to hear about Elimelek's field. We may have felt more thoroughly informed about Boaz' plans from the threshing floor scene than was our right. Perhaps, though, the imagery of the story should have readied us for the introduction of this field. We have already seen two fields, closely associated with Ruth and reflecting various aspects of the seed complex; here is a third one. Again--though in a way different still from the ways in which the equivalence of the woman and the Fields of Moab and the woman and the field of Boaz were underlined--Ruth is made equivalent to Elimelek's field: on the day the redeemer would buy the field, Boaz will claim Ruth; when the redeemer reneges, Boaz acquires both. Ruth and the field are the entity which will resolve all the dearth of seed in the story: food, husband, redeemer, heir. The woman and the field resolve the crises of infertility and death. All of the spatial imagery converges to contribute force to this seed-field symbol.

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[1] Sasson, *Ruth*, pp. 111-112.

[2] Sasson, *Ruth*, p. 109. M. Burrows, "The Marriage of Boaz and Ruth," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 59 (1940): 446 (hereafter cited as Burrows, "Boaz and Ruth").

[3] E.g., we have more information about Boaz during chapter 2 than either Naomi or Ruth does.

Plot Structure

The next area which can be investigated in terms of seed symbolism is the plot of the story. The understanding of the story's plot is heavily dependent on legal knowledge, and as a result, a substantial proportion of all discussion about the story of Ruth deals with the law. Interpretations of legal matters and consequent application of conclusions to the story of Ruth are usually quite influenced by presuppositions, often unexpressed and possibly unrecognized, which have not always been fair to the narrative itself. Partly because such discussions are so much a part of the literature on Ruth, and partly in order to be clear about methodology here, I will comment on some of these presuppositions and corollaries while seeking to demonstrate how seed symbolism pervades the storyline.

As a basis for that discussion I will indicate the presuppositions on which my analysis rests. Without denying at all the importance of a proper understanding of the law's function in the story, I have chosen to interpret the story primarily from the point of view of its own dramatic structures rather than as an illustration of some legal practice. The story's careful construction and its artistic and consistent development makes such an approach valid.

1. The plot is plausibly constructed, so that there is no discontinuity or incompatibility between steps. D. R. G. Beattie refers to this point as a principle of coherence and intelligibility: the reader must be able to understand what is happening and how any incident in the story relates to the rest of the story.[1]

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[1] Some commentators, on the contrary, choose to bring in as much data from other seemingly pertinent sources as possible, so that the plot of Ruth can be explained in terms of a sort of amalgam of other materials--the presupposition being that the story must be explicable in terms of extant law and in terms of our understanding of that law. Two examples of such analysis from the many that occur will suffice to illustrate the problem. 1) Naomi's words of 1:11-13 indicate that she does not understand levirate law correctly since sons of hers, sired by another man than the father of Mahlon and Kilyon, would not be obliged to marry the widows of Mahlon and Kilyon and would not have lived together with Mahlon and Kilyon: M. David, *Het huwelijk van Ruth*, quoted in D. A. Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament, with Special Attention to the Book of Ruth* (Cherry Hill, N.J.: Mack Publishing Co., 1974), p. 333. 2) In both Gen. 38 and Ruth the fundamental point of the levirate institution seems to have been overlooked since the sons are credited to their actual fathers: D. R. Mace, *Hebrew Marriage: A Sociological Study* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), p. 109. The presupposition seems to be that the story is defective if it does not conform to our understanding of the law.

2. Balancing that principle to some extent is the assumption that the storyteller will at the same time ensure that there is some suspense for the audience, as well as for the characters. A story whose plot has no tension for the audience is not a good story.[1]

3. However, once the climax of the story occurs, the audience should be able to see the steps by which the dénouement came about, and why such steps were ambiguous but logical at the time they occurred.[2]

4. The storyteller is reliable and does not mislead us.[3] Beattie has another principle similar to this one which he calls self-sufficiency. By this term he means that the storyteller will inform us of everything we need to know in

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[1] The question of exactly how the expectations of law and custom can be met is the source of uncertainty and tension in the story. To solve this dilemma deductively does violence to the artistry involved. E.g.: Naomi secures a home for Ruth by appealing to the redeemer. He supports her by marrying her. The obligation to raise an heir must have been part of the redeemer's responsibility to his clan. The blend of obligations of the redeemer was imposed by public opinion, even if they ran counter to his own interests: Burrows, "Boaz and Ruth," pp. 449-452. If the solution Burrows proposes had been the norm, it would scarcely have made a good ending to the story.

[2] Such a presupposition speaks against the methodology of some to excise as interpolation what does not seem to fit in with their reasoning. E.g., Anderson, pp. 173 ff.; J. A. Bewer, "Die Leviratsehe im Buch Ruth," Theologische Studien und Kritiken 76 (1903): 328-332; J. A. Bewer, "The Go'el in Ruth 4:14-15," American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures 20 (1903-1904): 202-206. These commentators feel sure that the levirate references must be secondary. It would seem preferable to interpret the story in such a way as to include all elements, if possible, and to be particularly hesitant to cut out such important verses as 4:5 and 10.

[3] L. Thompson, p. 33.

order to understand the story.[1]

Balancing this assumption, however, is the factor of distance between the storyteller and ourselves, a distance which always exists but which in certain situations (for example, written text, large time gap, significant cultural differences) becomes a difficulty. In the case of the Old Testament we cannot ever be totally or perhaps even substantially clear what important understandings the storyteller shared with his or her own audience. Insight from various quarters needs to be applied, but the factor of uncertainty is never eliminated.[2]

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[1] Beattie, "Ruth III," p. 40. Our interpretation cannot depend decisively on any information we do not have. E.g., we must not presume the necessity of a meeting between Naomi and Boaz between chapters 3 and 4, as does Robertson, p. 220; we must not try to explain the unnamed redeemer's answer in terms of data we were not given, as does H. H. Rowley, "The Marriage of Ruth," Harvard Theological Review 40 (1947): 92.

[2] Some commentators, however, seem to think that by systematizing law--both general Ancient Near Eastern law and specifically Old Testament law, some of the story's difficulties can be resolved. E.g.: 1) The distinction of A. Alt between casuistic law (being Canaanite) and apodictic law (being distinctively Israelite) is helpful in understanding Dt. 25. The law of the Canaanites was taken over by Israel--or else an Israelite practice was modified under Canaanite influence (since the setting is urban). There is no direct evidence of Canaanite practice, but the fact that Canaan shared the general Ancient Near Eastern legal heritage in the second millenium makes it possible to look for similar practices in Western Asia. From such materials we can see the natural and inevitable link between the inheritance of property (sometimes including the wife) and levirate marriage. What is (or becomes) distinctive in Israel is that the levirate marriage is not related to inheritance but to raising an heir for the dead: Burrows, "Levirate Marriage in Israel," Journal of Biblical Literature 59 (1940): 23-33. 2) If Obed were Mahlon's son, there would be no reason for Naomi to adopt him as she does: A. Jepsen, "Das Buch Ruth," Theologische Studien und Kritiken 108 (1937-1938): 421-422.

6. On the other hand, there are key areas of the story of which a temporal and cultural gap does not deprive us since we share a common humanity with the storyteller, and Ruth is a story about the lives of other human beings.

7. A bit more specifically: I assume that the story counts on a general attitude of conformity with the law and with custom, and in fact shows how the characters act in ways that surpass their strict obligation.[1]

8. There is some purposeful resonance between the story of Ruth and material of both Gen. 38 and Dt. 25.[2] We are meant to interrelate the stories, though not necessarily

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3) The responsibility of the redeemer to raise heirs for the dead was originally broad but gradually became restricted (the stages being--early to late--Ruth, Gen. 38, Dt. 25, Lev. 20): J. A. Bewer, "The Ge'ullah in the Book of Ruth," American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures 19 (1902-1903): 143-144.
4) To apply the responsibility which Deuteronomy restricts to brothers to a more distant redeemer may reflect a later and more stringent (e.g., post-exilic) interpretation, or an attempt to archaize in order to suggest that pre-Pentateuchal practice was stricter than Pentateuchal: S. Talmon, in a conversation with the writer.

[1] Cf. explanations of the story which conclude, on the basis of presuppositions falsely applied, that the characters act improperly. E.g., Boaz is derelict in his redemption responsibility: Carmichael, pp. 334-335; Robertson, p. 219.

[2] Rowley, p. 79.

to conclude that they are all referring to exactly the same kind of legal institution.[1]

With these eight assumptions in mind, the plot of the story can be discussed in order to understand its contribution to the story's meaning and to see how it contributes strength to the seed hypothesis. L. Thompson's description of the storyline as rushing toward and intensifying around certain nodal points[2] suits the story of Ruth quite well. My investigation will begin at the climax of the story (4:1-12), move ahead to the resolution of the remaining elements of the story (4:13-22) and then back up from the climax to see how the story was working in chapter 3, chaper 2, section 1:6-22 and section 1:1-5. There are two main points to be made. The first is that in terms of content, the story's main point is to relate the restoration of seed: food in the land, food for Naomi and Ruth, a husband for Ruth, a redeemer for Naomi, and an heir for the whole people. These particular things are all lacking at the outset of the story, and they are restored one by one. The field, a symbolic representation of the woman, is the locus of resolution of all these needs. The second observation to be sustained by this analysis of plot is that the way in which the restoration is detailed fits the seed-field imagery well. Each of the six main sections is decisive within its limits but none is complete. Each depends either on hints from previous sections to have prepared the ground or on an unfurling of details in the next sections to give us the clarity we need--or on both techniques simultaneously. The whole story of seed restoration depends upon appropriate timing and fortuitous conditions.

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[1] Cf. the following statements which would derive law from narratives: 1) The Deuteronomist in framing law constructs it on the basis of some particular ancient tradition. The specific details, narrowness of focus and conformity of vocabulary between law and narrative reinforce this hypothesis (e.g., Reuben's loss of his inheritance and Dt. 25:15-17; the sale of Joseph and Ex. 21:16, etc.). The levirate law of Dt. 25 is based on the story of Tamar. The law now seeks to enforce what the paterfamilias was responsible for seeing to while he lived. The section of the law where the widow insults her brother-in-law is a symbolic re-enactment of Onan's rejection of Tamar: Carmichael, pp. 325 ff. 2) Gen. 38 indicates that *marriage* might not be part of the levirate responsibility: Leggett, p. 39. 3) Gen. 38 shows a broadening of Dt. 25, since it implies that if the brothers do not take up their responsibility, the widow has the right to obtain fulfillment through her father-in-law: W. McKane, "Ruth and Boaz," *Transactions of the Glasgow Oriental Society* 19 (1961-1962): 27. 4) The marriage of Ruth and Boaz is a redemption marriage, a type of levirate marriage where the brothers do not live together but have separate estates. The redeemer acts as heir and takes the widow as part of the heritable property. Ruth is the only example of a redemption marriage: L. M. Epstein, *Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), p. 88.

[2] L. Thompson, p. 29.

4:1-12

The first question to ask about the scene 4:1-12 is what tensions are present as it opens.[1] The secrecy of the previous scene suggests that no one except the three main characters (and the audience) has any inkling that something is about to occur. Sasson suggests that part of this surprise is achieved by Boaz' acting before all the harvest activities are over and before the nearer redeemer has had a chance to investigate all the aspects of his position thoroughly.[1] It is certainly clear from the events of chapter 3 that Boaz needs to act as quickly as possible. The tension for the audience and for Ruth and Naomi is essentially the same, I think.[2] We have been informed that Boaz will marry Ruth but that there is a problem of a nearer redeemer. Exactly why a nearer redeemer is a problem is not clear to us--insofar as we do not know of a field to be redeemed--though perhaps the two women (and a Hebrew audience more contemporary with the storyteller) would have been more sensitive to the need that Naomi still has for a redeemer when Ruth is married. A careful distinction between the concepts of marriage and redemption in chapter 3 focuses the source of tension: who will be Naomi's redeemer--and more specifically, how will it be Boaz? The tension for Boaz relates to whether or not he

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[1] It is impossible to both work backwards from the climax and at the same time to have already noted the points of tension. So I choose the former procedure and will take care to substantiate later what I simply announce here.

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[1] Sasson, Ruth, p. 130. He bases this suggestion on the apparent discrepancy between the information about the completion of both wheat and barley harvests (2:23) and the reference to the threshing of the earlier barley harvest still going on in chapter 3.

[2] Naomi and we should know, though, that the marriage will be levirate. Ruth, being a foreigner, may not have gotten that complete a message.

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will be able to accomplish what we will come to learn is his goal: to become the redeemer of Naomi, and more. Boaz needs to get the nearer redeemer to cede him the land and the rights and obligations connected to it.[1]

The first four verses serve to underline the legality of the whole scene. The principles and witnesses are positioned, the details of the situation are carefully stated, the order of precedence is given. The nearer redeemer declares that he will accept his option, apparently envisioning no way in which he can lose the land to anyone else, including Naomi.[2]

The trap of the whole story is sprung in the controversial 4:5 by the verb that is written in one way and pointed in another. Boaz says, in effect: You take the land, then, as is your right as nearest redeemer. But know that I am going to marry Ruth--and in fact marry her precisely for the purpose of raising an heir to Mahlon, who can claim Elimelek's field. Boaz' words must be comprehensible in terms of the effect of surprising the nearer redeemer. The secrecy of chapter 3 has guarded the marriage plans shared by Ruth and Boaz; the rhetorical suggestions of his being a contemporary of Naomi have had the same effect. On the other hand, chapters 2 and

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[1] Robertson, p. 220.

[2] Sasson, Ruth, p. 115. It seems likely that if Naomi and Ruth remain husbandless and childless and if Naomi is elderly, chance would be against the redeemer losing the field to them--even at a time of jubilee--or to anyone else either.

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3 have symbolically prepared us for his marriageability by describing him in terms of productivity: he is a successful sower of seed. But even we who already know that he has promised to marry Ruth are surprised that he is entering a marriage "to raise the name of the dead man over his inheritance"--a levirate marriage.[1] If the nearer redeemer's change of mind cannot be explained on the grounds of ignorance of his relatives and dependents or of his own moral obligations to them[2] or on the grounds that Boaz is trying to slip across some illegal procedure,[3] it can only be explained by Boaz' introducing consequences that the other man had not anticipated but which clearly threaten him in some way. Those consequences would be something like the following: if the unnamed redeemer redeemed the field, he would be out the purchase price but could expect to keep the field, since there was apparently no prospect of male heirs; he had no obligation to marry Ruth when acquiring the field, nor was she part of the acquisition.[4] Even if Ruth married, as she was free to do,[5]

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[1] T. C. Vriezen, "Two Old Cruces," Oudtestamentische Studiën 5 (1948): 87.

[2] Leggett, pp. 239-240, finds such ignorance implausible, though his alternative differs from the one I propose.

[3] D. R. G. Beattie, "Kethibh and Qere in Ruth 4:5," Vetus Testamentum 21 (1971): 492.

[4] McKane, p. 34, states that there is no clear evidence in the Old Testament that the levirate included the inheritance of the widow, although it is a possibility pursued with some enthusiasm by a number of commentators.

[5] This can be seen from Boaz' words to her in chapter 3.

and even if she had a son, there would be no threat to his field, unless the marriage were a levirate marriage.[1] But if someone contracted a levirate marriage, then a child so sired could reclaim the land of his "father" from the redeemer.[2] Only when Boaz announces that he is going to marry Ruth and raise issue for Mahlon does the problem of the destruction of the nearer redeemer's estate enter plausibly.[3] One further point: if the nearer redeemer had any rights or obligations in regard to marriage, Boaz would have been risking that his clever idea would have such appeal that the nearer redeemer would act upon it himself. To those who wonder why Boaz would have undertaken such responsibilities Sasson points out that not only does Boaz love Ruth but also that the heir will be his in at least some way[4]--which we see from the genealogy.

The next few verses detail the ceremony of confirmation, the gesture and words by which the unnamed redeemer cedes his option on Elimelek's field to Boaz. Verse 9 calls the elders to witness Boaz' acquisition of all that belonged to Elimelek and his sons; verses 10-11 call them to witness Boaz' resolution to marry Ruth and to raise an heir for Mahlon. The witnesses acknowledge the transaction and bless the marriage.[1]

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[1] Naomi's words of 1:11-13 can be seen now as functioning to remind us simultaneously of the possibility of such a marriage but to dismiss it as improbable. We have been both alerted and lulled.

[2] Sasson, Ruth, p. 114.

[3] Ibid., p. 139, hypothesizes that any time the male heir or his family were in need, he (or they) could sell the field, which the redeemer would have to redeem, hence the threat to his estate. The solution is total relinquishment of his redemption rights--just the step Boaz had desired.

[4] Ibid., p. 140.

4:13-22

The story is not yet complete at the climax, for the actions so carefully articulated in the preceding section must be seen to bear fruit. The details are not quite as clear as might be desired, but on the assumption that they correspond to what has been so carefully prepared for, some suggestions can be offered with confidence.

The marriage, conception and birth of a son are related in 4:13. The remaining verses indicate how the child resolves the various problems with which the story has dealt. He is first of all a proof that the barrenness of Ruth and the emptiness of Naomi have ended. The blessing of 4:11-12 is accomplished, as the foreign woman builds the house of Israel once again. The second point that is clear is that the birth of the boy furthers the line which will produce the king. The reference to Perez, the genealogy, and the royal nuances of the blessing[2] all support this conclusion.

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[1] The reference in the blessing to Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, presumably in the name of the deceased Er, is highly appropriate.

[2] Parker, p. 30.

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The remaining two pieces of information that it seems reasonable to have expected are 1) that the baby is Boaz' heir and hence also in a position to be Naomi's redeemer, and 2) that the child is also heir to Elimelek and Mahlon. The first point seems reasonably well confirmed by the genealogy which lists Obed as Boaz' son and by the blessing which indicates that it is Boaz' house which Obed will build, just as Perez built Judah's. The exact relationship of the child to Naomi through Elimelek and Mahlon is less clearly implied. Boaz' words in 4:5 and 10 which were interpreted as his commitment to levirate marriage refer to Mahlon's name and to his heritage. There are two other references to "name": 4:11 has a parallel set of phrases, the first of which seems to refer to Boaz' ability to sire a son[1] and the second of which seems to allude to a name being called in Bethlehem--Mahlon's over his heritage, possibly. The final reference to "name" occurs in 4:14, where the women are blessing the Lord for not leaving Naomi without a redeemer, whose name is called in Israel. I would suggest that both references are applicable (at least) to Obed and that the reference to "name" serves

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[1] Campbell, Ruth, p. 153, follows C. J. Labuschagne, "The Crux in Ruth 4:11," Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 79 (1967): 364-367, in maintaining that both clauses beginning with imperatives refer to Boaz' procreativity: "to bestow a name" is parallel to the phrase "to sire a child." Campbell does not suggest that the name in this verse might be Mahlon's--referred to in 4:5, 10. Sasson, Ruth, pp. 154-156, agrees with Campbell and Labuschagne that the first imperative refers to Boaz' procreative power but thinks that the second imperative refers ahead to the topic of reputation of the line that is being founded.

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to link his two roles as Naomi's redeemer through Boaz and as heir to Elimelek's estate through his levirate relationship to Mahlon and Ruth.[1] His possession of the field--as both redeemer and heir--is a similar link. These end verses, then, show Ruth to have a husband and son; Naomi to have a redeemer (Boaz), a grandson and heir (through Mahlon), a second redeemer (Boaz' son); Mahlon's name is raised over his inheritance, called in Bethlehem; Boaz has a son whose line will produce kings.

3:1-18

The events of chapter 3 are crucial to the whole story and to the climax scene in particular. Having already discussed the climax affords the advantage of letting the most significant aspects be visible.

The opening verses consist of words of Naomi to Ruth--words whose full meaning is not readily apparent. The rest of which she speaks connotes both the security and benefits a woman might expect as she enters married life[2] and more metaphorically in this story, the rest that the land is and gives (Dt. 12:9: Ps. 95:11).[1] A related word was used previously in the story (1:9) and the home of a husband was where such rest was to be found. I will offer evidence later-- and so simply maintain here-- that Ruth's preparations are best associated with sexual readiness. Whatever the exact denotation of uncovering the legs of a sleeping man might be (a topic also to be treated in chapter four of this study), it would be difficult to argue that the connotation is not suggestive of sexual activity and that such an association is not clearly intended by the storyteller.[2] The connotations, however, are far from making Ruth a harlot, since both Boaz and Naomi have been quite concerned for Ruth's safety up to this point in the story. Naomi is sending Ruth to Boaz to suggest marriage to him.[4] A crucial question left vague here but obviously important in view of the development in chapter 4 is whether Naomi understood Boaz to be obliged to marry Ruth. In absence of any clear indication that she did, it seems more consistent with the rest of the story to understand that she did not,

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[1] Sasson, Ruth, p. 164, draws somewhat the same conclusion, though his understanding of the verses is substantially different from mine. Leggett, pp. 266-267, and Rowley, p. 98, also see Obed as son to both Boaz and Mahlon.

[2] G. A. Cooke, The Book of Ruth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), p. 3; Morris, p. 254; Sasson, Ruth, p. 63.

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[1] G. E. Wood, "Ruth," in The Jerome Biblical Commentary, 2 vol., ed. R. E. Brown, S.S., J. A. Fitzmyer, S.J., R. Murphy, O. Carm. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1968), 1:606.

[2] Campbell, Ruth, p. 131. [3] Rudolph, p. 53.

[4] A number of scholars prefer to distinguish a request for sexual relations from a marriage proposal. I am not sure such a distinction can be made in this particular story. Again, though, I think we can assume on the basis of the rest of the story that the actions of the characters are not only not contrary to the law but that their actions are virtuous beyond the demands of the law.

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and that her allusion to his being a kinsman and to his having shown kindness already (3:2) is an inducement to Ruth, and possibly a way of juxtaposing the two ideas in our minds. Surely if Boaz were obliged to marry Ruth it would be difficult to understand the need for the plan Naomi unfolds.[1]

There are two aspects to Ruth's part of the scene. On the one hand the storyteller emphasizes through dialogue and through narrative description that Ruth does as she has been told: she goes to Boaz, embodying the suggestion of marriage. At 3:9, however, she not only makes the request she was sent to make[2] but then takes the initiative and asks something else as well: she reminds

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[1] Robertson, p. 218.

[2] Not all commentators agree that Ruth's words, "Spread your garment over your handmaid" is a marriage request. Her words are no doubt meant to recall for us Boaz' blessing spoken to her in 2:12, where he prays that the Lord may shelter her fully with his wings. Leggett, pp. 192-193 points out the distinction between the plural כְּנָפַיִם (wings: a protection image derived from nature) and the singular כָּנָף (hem of a garment, skirt), which would favor the marriage connotation. Based on my interpretation that the institutions of redemption and marriage are kept distinct for purposes of artistry, and based on the marriage imagery that pervades this scene, I prefer to understand Ruth's request as relating primarily to marriage but the very expression of which maintains its relation with protection language--and thus helps to slide us toward her next request. Beattie, "Ruth III," pp. 42-43, thinks Ruth's marriage request is even clearer than is the same image used in the figurative language of Ezekiel 16:8--a reference that will be examined later in this study.

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the man that he is a redeemer. The crucial question is what the nature of the relationship between the two statements is: is Ruth requesting marriage *because*[1] Boaz is a redeemer, or is she requesting marriage and redemption? What is unclear--purposefully ambiguous, in fact--in Ruth's request may be clarified by Boaz' response, if we can assume that his words respond directly to her request. His words (3:10-13) first bless Ruth for two acts of *hesed*--the second of which refers to her having chosen him over other men. One implication of these words seems to be that Ruth was free to marry as she pleased;[2] a second is that Boaz has interpreted Ruth's request (at least part of it) as a marriage suggestion.[1] In 3:11 he states that he will do all that she asks--which in view of what has preceded and in view of what will follow is surely marriage. But in 3:12 he responds to a second topic--redemption--evidently in response to Ruth's second request of 3:9, a request for redemption. The complication Boaz refers to is the one he will resolve at the city gate. Boaz responds, then, to the two requests Ruth has made. The first he can promise to do; the second depends on one factor outside his control, but he will make sure that one of the redeemer's acts.[2] The connection of the two roles--marriage and redemption--is not obligatory; the juxtaposing of them here is a literary arrangement in this story[3] which serves to inform us of the general plan of Boaz but leave us unclear as to exactly how his plan will serve the purposes we are coming to appreciate. We are not meant to see the whole dénouement from this scene, so part of the ambiguity protects the surprise ending. In this scene Ruth is sent to request marriage; she asks that--and also redemption. Boaz says, though never explicitly, that he will marry her and that he will see redemption accomplished.

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[1] Most commentators assume that the conjunctive word *כִּי* connecting the two statements requires its most common translation, "because." However, it needs to be noted that this is the sole possibility only if one presumes that the redeemer has the obligation to perform a levirate marriage--a presumption that cannot be drawn from this story and hence should not be too quickly applied to it. Correspondence between Sasson and Beattie (both of whom agree that the redemption and levirate marriage responsibilities are being carefully distinguished by the storyteller) addresses the meaning of the word *כִּי*. Sasson argues that it is corroborative and emphatic: "The Issue of Ge'ullah in Ruth," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 5 (1978): 57 (hereafter cited as Sasson, "Ge'ullah"); Beattie finds the explanation rather dubious and prefers to base his explanation of the verse on an understanding of Ruth's whole statement as a general request for assistance because Boaz had been kind in the past; Beattie sees here neither a specific marriage request nor a specific and technical request for redemption. He, as does Sasson, insists that there is no legal obligation for a kinsman or a redeemer to marry: "Redemption in Ruth and Related Matters: A Response to Jack M. Sasson," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 5 (1978): 65-66 (hereafter cited as Beattie "Response"). Leggett, pp. 198-200, points out a number of Old Testament passages where the redeemer notion is broader than the few instances of its legal description.

[2] Leggett, p. 243; Robertson, p. 218; Sasson, "Ge'ullah," pp. 55-56.

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[1] Leggett, p. 201; Beattie, "Ruth III," p. 45.

[2] Sasson, "Ge'ullah," P. 56, believes that the syntax of both of Boaz' statements--וְעַתָּה (and now) followed by an imperative--conveys the drawing of a practical conclusion based on stated arguments. His biggest concern here is the indication that Ruth is the one to be redeemed, since he is convinced that only Naomi can be the object of redemption: p. 54. Beattie's earlier suggestion of a rather broader understanding of the redeemer's role seems pertinent here too.

[3] Beattie, "Response," p. 67.

It is not clear exactly what Naomi's understanding is that enables her to speak so confidently at the end of the chapter, but she undoubtedly understands the symbolism in Boaz' gift of seed in terms of marriage and quite possibly in terms of redemption of Elimelek's field; once we see the end of the story, even the implications of seed for the two women in terms of levirate marriage can be seen.

2:1-23

The first half of the story is not quite as dense as the second half and requires less explanation of the plot. The events of chapter 2 move the problems already introduced by chapter 1 toward resolution and also set up the factors on which chapter 3 depends.

The first details about the resolution of lack of food (already announced) appear in this chapter, and the resolution has a number of aspects: custom will offer the resolution of gleaning; Boaz will give Ruth food and water, and in sufficient amount for her to share with Naomi; he will also allow her to do more than glean in his field since she will actually gather grain from the bundles. The solutions to famine range from temporary (2:14, 18), to more adequate (2:17), to more long-term (2:8-9, 15-16, 21-23). The first introduction to the man who will help resolve the lack of human seed occurs here, too, though there is not much detail of the shape of his contribution (only hints).

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This chapter prepares for the threshing floor scene. Ruth and Naomi are given ample basis for their requests of Boaz. We, too, are able to be forming our ideas about him. Naomi presumably first knows him as a friend or relative of her husband and as a redeemer of herself. Ruth's first encounter with him introduces him as a man who acts with kindness and generosity. Once they pool information, each woman knows sufficient for her to act: Naomi can anticipate that Boaz might well agree to marry Ruth since he has shown special interest in her; Ruth can expect that since Boaz is a redeemer, he will act in the interests of herself and Naomi. The storyteller has given us both sets of information at the beginning of the chapter. Boaz is a man of worth, which implies wealth, success, productivity, upright behavior and character.[1] He is successful as an agriculturalist, gracious to a stranger, generous to his people--offering Elimelek's daughter-in-law food and drink, protection, and a plentiful source of food. The chapter sets up the question of whether Boaz will act decisively or not. There are hints that he will, and yet his actions are not quite what we might have expected, and his words indicate that he is leaving much of Ruth's need to be supplied by the Lord.[2] Ruth's initial plan would seem in accord with practices like those described in

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[1] Campbell, Ruth, pp. 109-111. [2] Rauber, "Values," p. 32.

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the law (Lev. 19:9, 23:22; Dt. 24:19) since she is an alien and a widow.[1] She requests an additional permission and gets at least that, if not more. The generosity of Boaz to Ruth is illustrated by hospitality (2:8-9), refreshment while she works (2:9, 14), words of consolation (2:11-12), privileges in his field (2:15-16) and a supply of food (2:17-18).

1:6-23

The scene which comprises most of chapter 1 announces the resolution of the problem of food supply (1:6, 22), leaving chapter 2 to differentiate the various aspects, as has been noted. The verses 6-22 focus also on the apparent hopelessness of the other seed deficiencies of the story: there are no prospects of husbands or children, little hint that a redeemer or levir will make an appearance. Naomi's words both raise and dismiss the possibility of levirate marriage. The other way in which this section anticipates the food resolution is Naomi's reference to the Lord as the one responsible for her empty state. The legal genre in which she makes her accusation[2] will be the medium for its redress. Most of the plot of 1:6-22 concerns the question of who will accompany Naomi, and though it is important to the story, it is not particularly complex.

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[1] Some commentators wonder why Ruth needs "favor" in order to do what is apparently her right. Sufficient explanation would seem to lie in the rather persistent prophetic accusation that the poor are not being cared for as the law had envisioned.

[2] Campbell, Ruth, p. 62 argues the case for the legal overtones of her statement.

1:1-5

The five opening verses introduce the themes of death from which the story will draw life: famine in nature leading to exile; death and barrenness leading to Naomi's being without any family except foreign daughters-in-law. The story's content will serve to intensify the power of the basic symbol.

Character Relationships

The characters are in some senses the primary means of our understanding the plot, since it consists mostly of their actions and words.[1] My comments about the characters, however, will be restricted to demonstrating a number of ways in which they can seen to support the hypothesis. Both the actual content of who they are and how they act and the form by which it is conveyed to us can be analyzed in terms of fertility images.

The first way in which they can be seen to contribute to such imagery is by the nature of the primary ties that relate them to one another. The web most frequently discussed in scholarly material is the legal one: the ways in which they are juridically obligated to one another. More basic, though, than legal ties (which each of the major characters

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[1] Scholes & Kellogg, p. 104.

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seems to act well beyond, anyway)[1] are familial ties. The story shows how characters related through kinship obligations to or through the dead replace these ties by bonds with the living. Here as elsewhere the movement from death to life is stressed.

That the main characters are all linked as a family hardly requires further comment. Even Boaz' workers are referred to in intimate terms. Only the women of the town and the elders fall outside the kinship group. The shift from ties of death to ties of life is easily seen: Naomi's tie to Ruth and to Boaz through her dead husband and son is replaced by a new link to each through the other, since Boaz is her redeemer and Ruth is the mother of her grandson. Naomi's relationship with Obed also gives her new ties with his parents. Ruth and Boaz begin their relationship because of their connections with the dead Elimelek and Mahlon and with the barren and bereft Naomi. Their new tie is of course their marriage bond, and their son Obed gives them a living link not only to Naomi but also to the dead Elimelek and Mahlon. The pattern is also visible from its shadow side: Orpah and the unnamed redeemer, also originally linked to the women through their connections with the dead, decline to renew their relationships with Naomi and Ruth and stay linked only through the dead. Eventually they are no longer linked at all.

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[1] E. G., Ruth chose to accompany Naomi; Boaz went well beyond not infringing Ruth's right to glean; he had no strict obligation to marry her or to raise a son for Mahlon until he so committed himself; he did not even have a strict obligation to redeem as long as the nearer redeemer was willing to do so.

A second way in which the characters' interrelationships can be seen is in their refraction by the field symbol. The Fields of Moab, part of Ruth's epithet, stresses continually that she is foreign but returned and hints that as she has been death in the story, she may also become life. Her journey to the field of Boaz, fertile and seeded, is her turning from death toward life. The contrast between the non-producing Fields of Moab and the field of Boaz is enhanced as Ruth spends first the day and then the entire season there, becoming so identified with it that she is able to bring forth and give to Naomi from her sufficiency--a gesture that foreshadows Naomi's receiving Obed from her.[1] The stark contrast of these two fields prepares us to anticipate a third field which will bridge the differences between them permanently. The field of Elimelek is the locus in which life returns fully and permanently. Boaz' acquisition of it is his redemption of Naomi; it is the inheritance over which he raises the name of the dead Mahlon; it is the occasion on which he enables Ruth to bear fruit.

There are two ways that the manner in which the storyteller describes the interrelationships of the characters also shows evidence of the seed and field. The first, already noted in the structure and by its effect of preserving the secrecy of the story's resolution is the equating of characters. Ruth's relationship to Naomi and her relationship to Boaz can be seen first in contrasting elements--but also in the attraction of like elements which is eventually stronger than the incongruity of disparate features. Age, certainly, but also homeland separate the two women. Naomi's bitterness prevents her at first from wishing to be joined by her foreign daughter-in-law. More perceptively than most commentators,[1] P. Trible senses that Naomi's silence is not peaceful but angry and that the journey to Bethlehem which ends with words about emptiness has been made in silence,[2] each woman in effect journeying alone. Ruth's beautiful words of faithfulness are only the first step in her desire to bridge the difference between herself and her mother-in-law. It is her next two journeys--made more visibly alone--which actually serve to ensure that she will share Naomi's God and her people and that Naomi will share Ruth's journey to fruitfulness and the rest of her lodging-place, Boaz' home.

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[1] Rauber, "Ruth," p. 173.

A similar pattern can be seen in her relationship with Boaz. Boaz is male, Israelite, wealthy, productive, older, benefactor, recipient of Ruth's iniative. She is female, foreign, marginal, barren, younger, in need of protection, the initiator of plans. What unites these characters eventually in spite of the extensive differences, is their common worthiness (*חַיִל*).[1] Their strength and goodness draws them to one another and makes their differences productive.

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[1] Most commentators feel that Ruth has won Naomi over by 1:18.

[2] Trible, p. 173.

The main way, however, in which the storyteller uses character relationships to bring life from death and to multiply its effects is through the device of blessing. One form of the pattern consists in a person's invoking blessing upon another--and at the same time involving himself or herself as well as the Lord in accomplishing the good. So Boaz' words to Ruth in 2:12 pray that the Lord will shelter her under his wings--but it is Boaz' "wing" which is the one to shelter her--to his benefit as well as hers. Every main character is the object of a petition of this sort, and in almost every case the prayer is answered in part by the one who spoke it: Naomi's blessing of Ruth (1:8-9) also eventually involves her own life in the rest secured by Ruth's husband; Naomi blesses Boaz for his kindness to Ruth and herself (2:19) and then takes the initiative in securing additional favor from and for him; Ruth binds herself to Naomi by solemnly invoking the Lord (1:16-17) and then acts to provide a "people" for her mother-in-law and for herself as well.[2]

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[1] Campbell, *Ruth*, pp. 124-125; Sasson, *Ruth*, p. 88.

[2] Trible, p. 173.

The blessing device is not just an extra ornament, but a very direct way of combining human activity with divine in such a way as to make them inseparable; each major character acts as a servant of the Lord to others and at the same time to self. As Trible describes it: "On the human level, females and males move between life and death. On the divine level, God works between blessing and curse. The human movements are open and deliberate, while the divine activity is hidden and fortuitous."[1] She also points out a second way in which the blessing device works: the human activity is the pattern for the divine. The hesed of the Lord is to be in proportion to the hesed shown by Ruth and Orpah (1:8-9): "...[T]hese female foreigners become models for Yahweh. They show the deity a more excellent way."[2] Besides blending human and divine activity in formulaic statements, the storyteller also makes the connection in narrative. Of the twenty-three[3] references to the deity, the two which are narrated describe God as giving seed: 1:6, 4:13. "Intercourse between Ruth and Boaz is itself a divine activity,"[4] foreshadowed by the planting of the seed in the field at Bethlehem.[5] The characters, including the deity, embody the nature symbolism in their roles and interrelationships.

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[1] Trible, p. 166.

[2] Ibid., p. 170.

[3] Hals, p. 4: the name of God appears nine times in prayer (1:8-9; 2:12, 20; 3:10; 4:11-12, 14), twice in greetings (2:4).

[4] Trible, p. 193.

[5] Sasson, "Divine Providence or Human Plan?" Interpretation 30 (1976): 415-419, finds the emphasis of commentators such as Hals and Campbell on the significance of divine-human action excessive. It seems to me that the pattern is too consistent and too deeply rooted in the story to be unimportant.

Conclusion

The investigation of the seed-field hypothesis in terms of temporal and spatial elements, plot structure and characters has validated the hypothesis and in fact enriched it. The demonstration of seed and field elements both in surface features and in deeper ones has shown adequately that they are central to the story.

CHAPTER IV

INVESTIGATION OF MOTIFS FROM THE STORY OF RUTH AND FROM COMPARATIVE MATERIAL

With the central importance of seed and field imagery illustrated both on the rhetorical level and in terms of content features, it is now possible to examine the motifs of the story in the context of seed and field symbolism without feeling that such an interpretation is not justified and without having to emphasize constantly the centrality of the symbol.

A motif is classically defined as the smallest element in a tale which has the power to persist in tradition.[1] D. Irvin, who has worked with motifs from Ancient Near Eastern texts and from scripture, narrows the definition to describe a motif as a plot element which moves the story foward a step. A motif need not be an action, but it must be an organic plot element, related to the unfolding of the story.[2] I would further refine the concept to suggest that a motif is an element--an action of a character, an aspect of a character, an object, a circumstance--which contributes meaning at the content level[1] of the story. The motifs are specific details by which aspects of the story already discussed in terms of temporal and spatial features, plot development, and character roles and relationships are fleshed out. Some of them receive emphasis through the rhetorical expression of the story. The motifs are another way in which the story articulates the basic symbol.

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[1] S. Thompson, The Folktale (New York: Dryden Press, 1946), p. 415.

[2] D. Irvin, Mytharion: The Comparison of Tales from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1978), pp. 2-3.

In addition to working with motifs from the story of Ruth, this chapter will also introduce a set of twenty comparative tales which will both add insight to the motifs at work in Ruth and clarify the manner in which narratives communicate. The following contentions will be substantiated by the study of Ruth and the twenty narratives:

1) Stories selected according to the criterion of explicit reference to fertility in nature and among human beings employ generally common ways of using space and time notations. They also can be shown to conform to a general structure (crisis in nature or in family relationships, temporary respite and/or intensification, climax events, resolution of crisis to at least some extent, so that nature and family relationships are stabilized with some benefit to the larger social group); the character roles can be standardized, but in these stories virtually all the roles (except that of

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[1] The content level distinguishable from the formal level, the manner in which the story is told.

ordainer in some tales) are filled by family members. The general use of time and place to convey meaning, the general structure of crisis, intensification, climax, resolution, and the character roles are common to many narratives, but the specific use of fertility and family imagery to realize them is characteristic of all twenty-one stories chosen. The primary communication of their meaning is not in their general features but in their more specific details.

2) The twenty-one stories do not share the same plot or storyline. There are several different stories told by the set of twenty-one narratives (though not twenty-one distinct ones). The primary communication of meaning is not from the storyline itself but from the more general elements by which it is constructed.

3) What the twenty-one stories share is most visible from a study of their motifs. It is in these elements that they share meaning, and for this reason they can illumine one another. The motifs of the stories reflect the seed-field symbol, which is primordial, and the similarity of motifs which reflect the symbol is great, even in diverse cultures.

4) The presence of the motifs is more important than the particular use the rational storyline may make of them.

5) The presence of the motifs is significant beyond the incidental and cultural details which may specify a given motif.

6) Comparison of motifs makes it possible to see what is essential to the motif and what is accidental, what is

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cultural and what is more universal.

7) The interrelationship of motifs--the motif configurations--offers further help to the disclosure of meaning, because they say together more than any can say singly. In configuration the motifs give context for one another and thus intensify the meaning offered.

The study of the key motif configurations from seven of the stories gives a good indication of the way in which the motifs convey meaning. The motifs serve as paths from the underlying symbol toward the surface of the story. When the same motifs are utilized by a number of stories which are similar, the depth of meaning they carry with them is enhanced as well as clarified. To understand the meaning of the motifs from a more systematic, disciplined study of them gives additional precision to the intuitive feeling about their meaning that may launch such an investigation in the first place. The following insights emerge from a study of the fertility motifs in the stories and will be demonstrated in the material of this chapter:

1) The journey motif functions in the story as a time of waiting, of maturing, of secret growth and strengthening. Journey and arrival (marriage) are juxtaposed as time of apparent infertility and time of fertility. The journey is not merely a flight from disaster but is a time of waiting that will produce growth. What is represented in nature as the time when seed rests invisibly within the earth, when the field seems bleak and barren, is represented on the human level as a journey across the face of the earth in search of

a resting place or a home.

2) The woman's journey is decisive. It is her journey across the earth and her arrival at a new home (which is both strange to her and home as well) that affects fertility, perhaps adversely for a time, but positively in the end.

3) The journey also functions to illumine--in fact to create--the identity of the woman who is able to be a bearer of life once she has arrived at her new home. She is first of all foreign: she always comes from outside the main group in some way. The journey also makes clear that she has two aspects to her nature: she is daughter--begotten, receiver of life and nourishment--and she is wife and mother--begetter and giver of life. Her journey pulls her simultaneously toward and away from her mother. She must cease to be a daughter in some senses to become a wife, but in becoming a wife she is also united to that aspect of her mother in a new way. She is also pulled toward a husband whom she needs in order to bring life, but there is a basic lack of sameness or compatibility or unity between the man and the woman that leaves the woman unable to be simply wife, but inclines her back to her own mother or to become a mother of a child herself. It is the paradoxical aspects of the woman--foreign and home, daughter and wife--and the alternation between these aspects--that is the source of her fruitfulness. The journey is the time in which we are able to see the various ways in which she is pulled and attracted and becomes ready for her

role.

4) Part of the journey is search and difficulty encountered by the hero, who must prove himself willing, worthy and able to release the life forces that are latent in the woman. His ability is challenged and must be demonstrated before he is given the opportunity to marry the heroine, to provide a home within which she may be fruitful. His apparent or temporary infertility must be overcome by his strength of character or by his cunning. The stratagem or device which demonstrates this ability is life-related: the man attracts the woman by demonstrating his suitability to help her release the forces of life.

5) Human sexual relationships and fertility of the land are inextricably connected. The sexual condition of the woman is analagous to--and intimately related to--the earth. As the earth produces fruit which is taken, so is the woman vulnerable. But she is also portrayed as taker of fruits of nature. Hence again the nature or role of the woman gains depth and complexity from the paradox: she is both vulnerable and violator, acted upon and agent, deceived and responsible.

6) The stories reflect tension between the life forces as cyclical--which they surely are in nature and on the human level--and the idea of life force as a basic fertility underlying cyclical change. Times of dearth are not what they seem, since they are contributing to, and ultimately are overcome by, larger fertility. The field does not always produce--not at every time of year and not every year, yet

it remains a sorce of fertility.

7) Eating and fasting, sexual relations and continence, are related to the release of the forces of fertility. The choice of whether to participate or abstain is a question of the suitability of time and place. The human pattern of participation in eating and sex is both reflective of and effective upon the presence of life on all levels, from the physical to the spiritual. Death and devastation must alternate with re-seeding if life is to be present. For human beings to enter into this life cycle is important if they are to share the strength of its forces.

8) The stories reflect a struggle between the sets of components necessary for life to continue. In all the stories the distinction between the man and the woman, the separateness of their roles in the fertility process is stressed. There is a mutuality and compatibility necessary, but the co-operation does not erase the basic differences in their approaches to life and to each other. Again, it is the very struggle which is the source of life.

9) The other fruitful tension that is visible from the motifs is the struggle of the humans with the deities, a struggle that is reflected and resolved within the sphere of nature. The deities are stronger than the woman, but her protest against seemingly arbitrary power gives her an opportunity to take responsibility for the pattern of events which will affect her life. Part of her task or nature as

life-bearer is to participate in her own destiny and in shaping the destiny of others.

The discussion of this material will proceed in three parts. First will be an introduction to the general fertility motifs of the twenty stories and Ruth. A second section will examine in greater detail a few of the motifs common to Ruth and the Iroquois Corn Goddess stories; a third part will look at motifs shared by Ruth and three versions of the story of Demeter and Persephone.

Fertility Motifs from Comparative Material

My purpose in choosing to use other materials to study Ruth's motifs was so that I would be able to identify and understand the key motifs in Ruth with greater precision and depth. I chose the stories with some criteria in mind: 1) All the materials can be loosely classified as narrative. Each unfolds a story that has some tension to it. I excluded hymns that were simply recitals of events but included hymnic materials that recited stories with dramatic structure.[1] 2) Each narrative chosen has explicit reference to both human fruitfulness and fertility in nature.[2] The fruitfulness

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[1] Some Sumerian materials that might otherwise have been informative were excluded by this criterion: e.g., "Enki and World Order."

[2] Certain materials frequently associated with the season pattern of the Ancient Near East--e.g., the Canaanite poems of Baal, the Hittite story of the disappearance of Telepinu--were excluded because they lack explicit and sustained reference to human sexuality.

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fertility connection may be expressed negatively (human death, sterility or barrenness and disaster in nature). Most stories have both positive and negative expressions of fertility. 3) The materials selected were generally the same length as Ruth.[1] 4) Some materials were taken from the same culture as Ruth, some were taken from cultures adjacent in time and place, and some were selected from a culture radically distinct from Ruth.[2] My purpose was to ensure that I was not limiting the discussion to materials genetically related or borrowed.

Criteria neglected here--not so much because I doubt their importance but rather to limit the scope of the investigation, should also be made explicit: 1) I chose not to work with factors related to how the stories were created or transmitted.[3] All the stories are now in written form.[4] 2) I have not made specific genre distinctions. To classify was not my intent; and though a consideration of genre constraints which preside over the creation of materials is important, it is not my concern in this paper. 3) Only incidental is the question of whether any of the stories are "the same as" or "are" the story of Ruth. 4) My intent was not to find all the pertinent stories--simply a few useful ones. 5) I am not concerned with the many aspects of the stories, such as their dates, possible influences on them, the setting which produced them, etc., but simply with how their motifs contribute to fertility concerns and generate meaning. A few general comments about the twenty stories as a group will serve to illustrate their general compatibility with what has been said so far about the content of Ruth.

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[1] Excluded, e.g., are Claudian's recital of the Demeter-Persephone story and Hesiod's reference to the tale in the Theogony. This criterion does not mean to imply that such versions are not important--and that they would not contribute insight--but that simply to limit the investigation those of a similar length were used.

[2] According to anthropologist W. N. Fenton, "Iroquois Indian Folklore," Journal of American Folklore 60 (1947): 393, Iroquois mythology is little affected by European contact. Fenton also cites the opinion of S. Thompson that no other tribe shows such independence in their tales as do the Iroquois.

[3] Such factors include, e.g., questions related to spontaneity and performance, to tradition and creativity, to the effect of writing on the materials, etc.

[4] The cultures within which the majority of the stories lived have given us the written versions. The North American tales were found in oral form within a group which had no written language and were set down by anthropologists from other cultures.

The twenty stories selected for comparison are:

story #1: Iroquois story of the Corn Goddess[1]
#2: Iroquois story of the Maize Maiden[2]
#3: Iroquois story of Corn (and flood)[3]

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[1] D. Jenness, *The Corn Goddess and Other Tales from Indian Canada*, Anthropological Series, no. 39 (Ottawa: Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, 1956), pp. 1-3.

[2] K. E. Kidd, (*Canadians of Long Ago: The Story of the Canadian Indian* (Toronto: Longmans, Green & Co., 1951), pp. 165-169.

[3] J. Curtin and J. N. B. Hewitt, collectors, "Seneca Fiction, Legends and Myths," *Thirty-second Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution*, ed. J. N. B. Hewitt (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910-1911), pp. 636-642.

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story #4: Sumerian story of Inanna and Shukallituda[1]

#5: Sumerian story of Enki and Ninmah[2]

#6: Ugaritic story of Aqhat[3]

#7: Ugaritic story of Keret[4]

#8: Greek Homeric Hymn to Demeter[5]

#9: Latin story of Proserpina[6]

#10: Latin story of Ceres[7]

#11: Latin story of Cinyras and Myrrha[8]

#12: Hebrew story of Creation and Disobedience (Gen. 2:4b-3:24)

#13: Hebrew story of Abram and Sarai in Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20

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[1] S. N. Kramer, "A Blood-Plague Motif in Sumerian Mythology," Archiv Orientální 17, I (1949): 399-412; S. N. Kramer *History Begins at Sumer* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Doubleday Books, 1959), pp. 70-75; Interview with D. Foxvog, Berkeley, California, 9 May 1979.

[2] S. N. Kramer, trans., "Enki and Ninmah," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed., edited by J. B. Pritchard, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 37-41 (hereafter cited as ANET).

[3] H. L. Ginsberg, trans., "Aqhat," in ANET, pp. 149-155.

[4] Ginsberg, trans., "Keret," in ANET, pp. 142-149.

[5] H. G. Evelyn-White, trans. and ed., *Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns and Homerica* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 289-325.

[6] F. J. Miller, trans., *Metamorphoses*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1921), 1:264-285.

[7] J. G. Frazer, trans., *Ovid's Fasti* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951), pp. 218-235.

[8] Miller, 2:242-251.

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story #14: Hebrew story of the Wooing of Rebekah (Gen. 24)

#15: Hebrew story of Isaac and Rebekah in the Negeb (Gen. 26:1-13)

#16: Hebrew story of Reuben and the Mandrakes (Gen. 30:14-18)

#17: Hebrew story of the Motherhood of Tamar (Gen. 38)

#18: Hebrew story of Tamar and Amnon (2 Sam. 13:1-39)

#19: Hebrew story of Elijah and the Dead Child (1 Kgs. 17:8-24)

#20: Hebrew story of Elisha and the Dead Child (2 Kgs. 4:1-37).

The stories usually have a remote or archaic time setting but also some immediate relevance to common human experience and to cultural factors that would have connected the original audiences with the stories. The vagueness of the past leaves room for resonance with the richness of all its connotations. Each story also has as a special timing device: the availability of the deity to intervene in the story's events. Each narrative shows past events to have been decisive for the present. They all also tend to draw on specific special times--for example, time of famine, of plague, of sickness and death, of festival, of harvesting or shearing. The locales of the stories are also both remote and familiar. In every story there is a sort of journey from the familiar site to a stranger site. Often one of the locales is particularly well-suited to fertility concerns: for example, home of the Corn Goddess, garden of Inanna, Shrine of Demeter, bed of consort, fertile land. The analysis

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of the motifs will provide the opportunity for additional discussion of some of these features.

The twenty stories and Ruth can be shown to conform to a general structure of crisis (perhaps with a period of harmony preceding)--a crisis either in nature or in the family relationships. The characters act in such a way as either to effect a temporal respite or to worsen or deepen the original crisis. In all the stories the crisis (or episodes of crisis) eventually involves both nature and family patterns (often sexual patterns) and through these two realms the larger social and socio-religious realms are affected. The plots pit the forces of life against the forces of death. At the turning point of each story, the forces of life rally in some way, with the result that the forces of destruction are held back, if not totally vanquished. An equilibrium which is at least an improvement over the crisis, if not a return to pre-crisis stability and integrity, is achieved. The characters and often a more general population benefit. A chart on pp. 111-113 indicates the way in which Ruth and seventeen of the twenty stories conform to this structure.[1]

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[1] One Sumerian and two Ugaritic stories are too incomplete to analyze in terms of even so general a structure. They contribute to an understanding of the use of motifs, though, and their inclusion in the study broadens the Ancient Near Eastern base. The chart also serves as a general outline of the stories.

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#	initial situation	crisis	response	deepening of crisis	climax action	equilibrium
1	hunter in forest; people have no knowledge of agriculture	treats fallen tree respectfully when its death threatens life in the forest	Corn Goddess comes to him; brings food to his people	hunter's brother insults Corn Goddess; she leaves; famine ensues	hunter goes to rejoin her	he returns to village with food from her; crisis eased; he leaves again
2	two brothers	hero tries to care for injured corn; famine comes	Maize Maiden comes to him; corn returns to people	brother insults Maize Maiden; she leaves; corn disappears	hero goes to rejoin her	they both return; evil brother dies; no more famine
3		flood and starvation; people scrape bark for food	Corn Goddess comes to marry a young man; corn returns to bins	brother insults Corn Goddess; she leaves; corn disappears	hero goes to rejoin her	he returns with food
5	unclear	a) no water b)	a) Enki provides it b) Enki sires three goddesses			
		c) Uttu requires him to bring fruit to her	c) he impregnates her with eight plants	he eats plants and sickens; goddess abandons him	fox goes to bring goddess back; she heals him	deities born of him
8	**Persephone gathers flowers**	**she is kidnapped and raped by her mother's brother**	a) **search of Demeter for Persephone**	a) **anger at knowledge of culprits**		
			b) **disguises herself and stays at house in order to immortalize son**	b) **boy's mother unwittingly prevents her son's immortalization**		
			c) **she demands a temple**	c) **she causes a year of infertility**		
			d) **Zeus sends deities to summon her**	d) **she refuses to heed them**	**Hermes goes to Persephone, but Hades tricks her into eating**	**she will spend some time above earth, some below; end of famine**

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#	initial situation	crisis	response	deepening of crisis	climax action	equilibrium
9	Proserpina gathers flowers	she is kidnapped and raped by Pluto, her father's brother	a) Cyane tries to stop him b) Ceres searches and is mocked by a boy c) Cyane informs Ceres of the culprit	a) she is changed into a pool b) she changes him into a lizard c) she inflicts famine on the earth	Ceres intercedes with Jove for Proserpina's return; he agrees if she has not eaten; she had and someone tells	Proserpina's time will be divided between her mother and her husband; end of famine
10	Ceres teaches humans how to cultivate; Proserpina gathers flowers	Proserpina is kidnapped and raped by her father's brother	a) search of Ceres b) accepts hospitality of family; cures son who was sick c) tries to immortalize son d) finds out culprit	c) mother unwittingly thwarts process	Ceres asks Jove for Proserpina's return; he agrees if she has not eaten; she has	her time is divided
11		Myrrha's desire for her father	she tries to hang herself but is rescued by nurse	nurse finds out why Myrrha is distraught	Myrrha sleeps with her father	she is expelled and changes to a tree and bears a son
12	absence of any evil	command issued	obedience	serpent tempts woman	she eats; he eats; they know nakedness	put out of garden and given clothes
13		famine	Abram & Sarai go to Egypt; he says she is his sister	Pharoah takes her	the Lord afflicts Pharoah; he learns truth	Abram and Sarai sent on their way

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#	initial situation	crisis	response	deepening of crisis	climax action	equilibrium
14		old age of Abraham; no wife for Isaac	servant sent to find a relative	uncertainty over how to find her	family seeks delay; she says she will come	she becomes Isaac 's wife
15		famine	Isaac and Rebekah goto Gerar; he says she is his sister	they are seen together	Abimelek finds out his near escape; chides Isaac	Rebekah is protected
16		strife between Leah and Rachel; childlessness of Rachel	Reuben finds mandrakes	women bargain for them	Leah gets Jacob; Rachel gets mandrakes	son born to Leah; son born to Rachel
17	marriage of Judah; sires sons; Er married to Tamar	death of Er	a) Tamar given to Onan b) Tamar left with no husband	a) Onan dies b) Judah left with no wife	Tamar gets Judah to impregnate her; he threatens her life	identity of father is discovered; twins born to Judah and Tamar
18		Amnon's desire for Tamar	a) his plan to seduce her	a) unwittingly furthered by David		
			b) seduction	b) wrath of Tamar's brother Absalom		
			c) plan of Absalom	c) unwittingly furthered by David	murder of Amnon by Absalom	flight of Absalom
19		drought	flight of Elijah to Sidon; given food by a woman	child of woman dies; she reproaches Elijah	Elijah raises him from the dead	he is restored to his mother who credits God
20	kindness of family to Elisha	woman has no son; Elisha promises her she will have one	she bears a son	he sickens and dies; she reproaches Elisha	Elisha raises him from the dead	he is restored to his mother
Ruth		famine, death, exile, foreigness, sterility	a) return; approach to Boaz	a) non-action of Boaz		
			b) approach to Boaz	b) response of Boaz	scene at gate	marriage, child, redemption, heirs

An analysis of the character roles in the twenty-one stories serves to standardize them enough for a few observations specific to these tales to be made.[1] The heroine is a female who is most basically and consistently on the side of the forces of life and fertility. The object in each story is life-related: e.g., food, safety, a spouse, a child. There is always an opponent of the life forces.[2] In each story there is a divine ordainer who maintains control over the events of the story, at least to some extent--or who has the authority and responsibility to do so. Most of the roles are filled by family members. (See chart, pp. 115-116).

Though the general plot structure and the character roles for these stories can be standardized (and hence are

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[1] Sasson, Ruth, pp. 201 ff., uses these same general roles in his commentary but assigns the roles to different characters in some cases than I do. It is difficult to tell if one's understanding of the story affects one's designation of the characters, or if the assignation of the characters to the role prompts one's way of viewing the story. The interesting point is that even with standardized roles, there is no guarantee that different interpreters will not fill them differently. The roles also seem unable to illustrate the possibility that a character can shift roles and act in complex relationship to a number of people, including self, at the same time. E.g., the action of a character can simultaneously aid and thwart the same goal. Again, I do not claim that my designations are the only possible ones; they are the choices I have made according to my criteria.

[2] Sasson's failure to designate any opponent in his analysis of the story of Ruth seems to me to be a sign that there is something amiss in his analysis. Or perhaps the implication is that the roles are not particularly suitable for the story of Ruth if they cannot sustain the possibility of abstract characters.

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#	heroine	heroine's helpers	helping device	object	opponent	opponent's helpers	ordainer	recipient
1	Corn Goddess	husband-hero	marriage	agriculture	brother-in-law of Corn Goddess	people (unwittingly)	Great Spirit	Iroquois people
2	Maize Maiden	husband-hero	marriage	corn	brother-in-law of Maize Maiden	people (unwittingly)	Great One	Iroquois people
3	Corn Goddess	husband and his relatives	marriage	corn	brother-in-law of Corn Goddess	people (unwittingly)	Corn Goddess' Mother; Master of Life	Iroquois people
4	Inanna	nature	plagues	punishment of culprit	Shukallituda	Sumerian people	Enki	(tablet broken)
5	Ninhursag	fox	speech; gestation and birth act	health and life	Enki	Isimud	some deity?	people; Enki
6	Paghat	(tablet broken)	(tablet broken)	life to Aqhat	Anat	Yatpan	El	(tablet broken at end)
7	Hurriya	Keret	marriage	child	infertility		deities	Keret
8	Demeter	Hecate and Helios	light; Hermes	return of Persephone	Hades		Zeus	Demeter, Hades humans
9	Ceres	Cyane and Arethusa	knowledge	return of Proserpina	Pluto	pomegranate seeds	Jove	Ceres, Hades, humans
10	Ceres	stars and Sun	herald god	return of Proserpina	Pluto	pomegranate seeds	Jove	Ceres, Hades, humans

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#	heroine	heroine's helpers	helping device	object	opponent	opponent's helpers	ordainer	recipient
11	Myrrha	nurse	secrecy; festival time	sex; child	kin relationship; law	mother	gods	people
12	Eve	Adam	skins for clothing	life	death; ignorance	serpent; fruit	the Lord God	all people
13	Sarai	Pharoah	plagues	food and safety	Abram	deceit	the Lord	Abram; all
14	Rebekah	servant	jewelry	wife, heir	lack of knowledge	signs	the Lord	Isaac; all
15	Rebekah	Abimelek	dream	food and safety	Isaac	deceit	the Lord	Isaac; all
16	Leah/Rachel	Reuben	mandrakes	sex, child	the other wife		the Lord	all
17	Tamar	Judah (unwittingly)	disguise	sex, child	death; Er, Onan, Judah		the Lord	all
18	Tamar	Absalom	deceit	sex	Amnon	David (unwittingly)	the Lord	no one here
19	Widow	Elijah	meal, oil	life of all three	famine, death		the Lord	all; woman
20	Wife	Elisah	sex	son's life	death		the Lord	woman; Elisha
R	Ruth/Naomi	Naomi/Ruth Boaz	surprise	life--all forms	death		the Lord	all

not unique to any story or culture or genre) and the general themes of the stories are the same (crisis in family relationships affecting nature, imbalances in nature affecting family life, inappropriate sexual relations, lack of seed or moisture in nature, etc.), the ways in which the plots of the stories discuss the themes, distribute the roles, and fill the structure vary. There are at least fourteen different plots among the twenty stories.[1] It is the level between the general structure, themes, and character roles and the quite specific plot arrangements that is the focus of this paper, and that is called the level of motifs.

The motifs are the specific ways in which the general plot structure and character roles of the story are fleshed out; they are the building blocks with which the various plotlines work; but most important, they are the clearest way in which the essential symbols which underlie the stories are articulated. The motifs which express the seed symbol (which is at least one of the key symbols in these stories about human fertility/infertility and nature's fruitfulness/ barrenness) can be drawn from the twenty stories and from

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[1] A case will be made that the three Iroquois stories are the same, and the recitals of the kidnapping and rape of Persephone are all related; a similar suggestion could be made about the stories of the patriarchs Abraham and Isaac going out of the land due to famine, and the two accounts of the Hebrew prophets raising a dead child to life.

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Ruth and listed for purposes of comparison.[1] See chart pp. 119-120).

The most significant observation is that the stories show a high degree of similarity of motifs. Not every motif is found or employed in every story, but each story shares a significant number of those listed. Several important conclusions follow from what has been seen so far:

1) The significant commonality of the stories is not from their general structure or from the fact that the character roles can all be equated.[2]

2) The presence of the motifs in the stories--rather than the particular arrangement of them, and sometimes irrespective of the details that further specify them--is the most important avenue to the meaning generated by the basic symbol(s).

3) The motifs are evidently not confined to one or related cultures but rise from the expression of some human

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[1] One of the drawbacks to working on the level of motifs is the inevitable lack of precision. Any motif can be made more or less specific, can be stated at various levels of abstraction. Since my purpose is to show similarity in motifs, I have listed them at a level general enough to allow the similarity to be seen, though attempting to leave them specific enough to be interesting. In that sense motifs can be considered to be "the same" even if their level of abstraction varies.

[2] This is contra Sasson, Ruth, pp. 197 ff., who finds the most significant factor to be the arrangement of the functions. The general theory for Sasson's approach to Ruth may be found in V. Propp, Morphology of the Folktale, 2d ed., edited by L. A. Wagner (Austin, Tes.: University of Texas, 1968).

motif	stories in which it appears
time of some event in agriculture	1,2,3,8,16,17,18,R
time of festival	8,11
setting of field/garden/glade/ water	2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,12,14, 16,19,20,R
setting at place of processed grain	1,2,3,6,18,19,R
setting of foreign land	1,2,3,5,8,9,10,12,13,14, 15,16,17,18,19,R
setting of journey or road	all but 16
setting at husband's home	1,2,3,4,5,7,8,9,10,11,12, 14,16,17,18,20,R
setting at mother's home	3,5,7,8,9,10,11,14,16,R
crisis of famine	1,2,3,8,9,12,13,15,19,20,R
crisis of drought or flood	3,4,5,19,20
crisis of excessive or inadequate sexual force	4,5,6,8,9,10,11,13,15,17, 18,20,R
crisis of childlessness	7,16,17,20,R
journey of woman to strange land	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11, 12,13,14,15,17,R
flight from disaster	1,2,3,4,5,11,12,13,15,16, 18,19,R
journey to remedy disaster	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,13, 14,15,17,20,R
tears or some sign of mourning	1,2,3,6,7,8,9,10,11,18,20,R
protestations of desire for unity	1,2,3,8,9,10,11,R
anger at deity	4,5,6,8,9,10,12,19,20,R
gift of food	1,2,3,5,8,9,10,12,14,16, 17,18,19,20,R
man-woman interaction	all

motif	stories in which it appears
concern for person's safety	1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,15,19,20,R
journey of woman between mother and husband	3,5,7,8,9,10,11,14,16,18,R
need for skill/cleverness/valor	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,12,13,14,15,16,18,19,20,R
disguise	6,8,9,10,11,12,13,15,17,18,R
knowledge motif	all but 16
vanquishing of foe	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,12,13,15,18,19,20,R
birth	5,6,7,11,16,17,20,R
clothing motif	8,9,10,12,14,17,18,R

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experience that is common to humanity.

4) The most fruitful approach to the motifs is not the joining of them into just one sequence, so that a few superficial comparisons can be seen,[1] but to examine them with more attention to the contribution each makes to the others.

The investigation of some of these fertility motifs and their function in the stories deepens the points that can be seen from the chart. A few preliminary clarifications need to be made. It is appropriate that the stories used for this more detailed scrutiny are two sets of three variant tales. The three Iroquois Corn Goddess stories appear, on the basis of storyline or specific plot arrangement, to be three versions of the same story. A single basic storyline also underlies the three versions of the kidnap and rape of Persephone. It is advantageous to work with variants for several reasons. First of all it is possible to see what features persist in the story and which do not, which are an essential part of the motif and which are more accidental. It is possible to see what details change or are adapted, and in what kinds of ways. I assume that what persists is

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[1] E.g., to equate Ruth and the Corn Goddess because both are foreign women, coming into a new land, affecting fertility in that land, with the approval of another woman who is a mother figure, finding a husband who is clever and virtuous and who proves himself worthy of her in some way limits what can be seen by the motifs. Or to suggest that the Canaanite Hurriya, a foreign woman who leaves her land and family to come to a new land and bear a royal heir to an important man at the behest of the deity, is the prototype for Ruth is inadequate. The motifs may be able to point out such relationships, but only after a more careful analysis has been made.

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important and what details shift or drop out are less important.[1] Repetition is another sign of an important feature, since to repeat a motif is to reinforce it--to send the same message again.[2] The forces of creativity at work in the telling of a story are great, and so the use of traditional materials--and of repetition in particular--must be regarded with great respect.[3] The disadvantage here, particularly apparent to those who work with traditional materials, is that three variants are hardly sufficient to provide much assurance about what is significant and what is not.

The investigation focuses on materials from three different cultures. Ruth represents the Hebrew materials,[4] the three narratives about Demeter and Persephone are Greco-Roman, and the three Corn Goddess stories are native to North America. The advantage of working with materials from diverse cultures is that it affords an opportunity to distinguish between the motifs, which seem to be shared, and the particular details nuancing them, which are often contributed by the culture. One particular disadvantage of these materials is that all three are removed from us in time, so that we are dependent upon interpreters between the cultures and ourselves. Another disadvantage is the paucity of helpful material about the Iroquois culture.

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[1] F. C. Bartlett, "Some Experiments on the Reproduction of Folk Stories," in The Study of Folklore, ed. A. Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 247-258) hereafter cited as Dundes, Folklore); F. M. Cushing, "The Cock and the Mouse," in Dundes, Folklore, pp. 270-276. This is not to deny that apparently trivial details persist, but to maintain that when they persist, they are making some sort of a significant contribution to meaning.

[2] C. Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach, 3d ed., edited by W. A. Lessa, E. Z. Vogt (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers), p. 301. Alter, "Biblical Narrative," p. 67, also suggests that repetition can function to reinforce a world view.

[3] Alter, "Biblical Narrative," p. 63.

[4] Other Hebrew narratives will be examined in the next chapter, where an additional layer of significance will be discussed as well.

A number of the motifs which appear on the chart are the focus of the following pages. It is not possible or necessary to study all of the motifs or even to approach them in a highly systematic way. The motifs are not single-stranded but occur in configurations not readily divisible. Each motif affects the others; they are intertwined and interrelated. The arrangement which follows is one of several ways in which motifs could be investigated.

Ruth and the Iroquois Corn Goddess Stories[1]

A study of four motif configurations from these four stories generates a number of insights into the meaning mediated by the basic fertility concerns common to these tales. Both the motifs and the conclusions to be drawn from them overlap to some extent, making some repetition inevitable. I will suggest significant points and substantiate them as I discuss the material.

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[1] The designation Corn Goddess is conveniently used for that figure in all three stories even if she has been named by other terms.

1. Journey-Marriage

The journey motif--and more specifically the journeys which surround the marriages in these stories--represents a time of testing and strengthening, a time of growth. It also serves to mark periods of separation which contrast with the periods of life shared together by the heroine and her husband. The journeys themselves are not times of fertility but periods of preparation; the journey is not empty or wasted time or space. The journeys are frequently in response to disaster, suggesting that the alternation of disaster and dearth may be experienced or perceived as a necessary prelude to fertility. The journey-marriage motif in these four stories also allows us to notice that fertility (or access to it) is not confined to any particular place. Flight from infertility may be necessary, but flight itself never solves the problem of lack of seed.

The journeys of the Corn Goddess illustrate the journey pattern in a very balanced and orderly way, as do the journeys of Ruth. The Iroquois heroine journeys from her land and home to find a new home and land with her husband.

She then must leave that home and land to return to her people. In response to this second journey of hers is her husband's going to rejoin her, a call that takes him from his people. He eventually chooses to return by the same path.[1] In each of their homes--and in the centers of the journeys--a period of marriage takes place.

The journey is an important motif in Ruth, as has already been suggested. The arrangement of the plan differs from that of the Iroquois stories, but not essentially. Naomi's family travels to a land foreign to it, where a period of marriage ensues. A second journey, in response to both disaster and the reversal of disaster, brings Naomi full circle and brings Ruth on the path that leads her simultaneously to a land new to her and to her home. Two small journeys (each back and forth) help bridge the distance between her role as foreign daughter-in-law and her role as wife, mother and daughter, dearer than seven sons. Marriage equivalents--Boaz' giving seed to her--occur in the middle of these small journeys. The eventual rest for Ruth on her journey is Boaz' coming to

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[1] In story #1 his first meeting with the heroine also occurs while he is away from the village, so that her first journey is with him. This story also ends (symmetrically) with him continuing to go in search of his wife. The endings of all three stories vary in detail and are a good example of what seems requisite and essential to the story (that the husband returns to his own people after his second period of marriage) and what seems variable and accidental (whether the heroine accompanies him back to the village and whether he remains, once fertility is restored).

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her in marriage.[1]

Though all four stories draw attention to the presence of the woman at the site to which fertility has come and express in various ways her involvement in its various facets, all four also emphasize the notion that fruitfulness or its opposite is not connected to one site. The Iroquois village and Bethlehem are the locus of feast and famine. In the story of Ruth we see the same point made about the foreign land of Moab: it is the place of both death and life. "The foreign land of Moab, which has already given to a Judahite family food (life) in the face of famine (death), now restores that depleted family to a transformed whole and provides it with a possible future (life) through the continuation of the family line."[2] The contrast between foreign (other) and home is important--but not because one has an exclusive claim to or control over fertility.

2. Marriage-Fertility

Closely related, obviously, to journey-marriage is marriage-fertility. These motifs emphasize that the marriage of the heroine and the hero, at a suitable time, is the source of fertility for the land and the people. The marriage of the two crucial people benefits a much wider group, just as a little seed, sown properly, provides many times its weight in grain. Human control over fertility is tenuous, but insofar as the deity ordains, the presence of life-giving forces is assured at least to some extent. The challenge for the heroine and for the hero in particular is to align themselves with the deity, a task that will be explored more fully below. Sufficient to note here is that the marriage which affects fertility is a difficult union to achieve. These points can be drawn from all four of the stories.

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[1] On this more mythic level of motifs it becomes a little easier to begin to understand the richness of Ruth's epithet--"she who has returned."

[2] Trible, p. 167.

Prior to the marriage of the Iroquois hero and the Corn Goddess, the village of his people lacks either food itself (through a natural disaster)[1] or the knowledge of agriculture.[2] In story #1 the Corn Goddess marries the hero while he is on a hunting journey, but it is their arrival and settling in the village that is the occasion of her sharing with the people the corn and bean seeds which she had been given by the Great Spirit. She brings them to the village, distributes them, shows the people how to plant them, gather crops, make mortars and pestles for grinding the corn, and how to bake bread from the corn meal.[1] The second story tells of a midsummer famine brought on, we are to believe, by the mistreatment and death of corn stalks. When the Corn Goddess comes to a young man who has tried to care for the injured stalks, he receives a gift of bread from her and the two pledge themselves in marriage. As a result, corn returns to the peoples' storage bins. The third story is more detailed but not essentially different in its skeleton. A flood is the cause of lack of food for a village of families. The Corn Goddess appears, chooses a young man to be her husband, and orders the people to clear out their storage bins and ready them for a new supply of grain. The return of corn is described in stages. First the villagers hear the sound of falling kernels during the night; then the Corn Goddess' sister-in-law finds enough new corn in her bins to fill both her hands; she bakes two loaves of bread, an amount which is mysteriously adequate for all the hungry people of the village; the people then clear out their bins and find them well-filled the next morning.

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[1] This is the case in stories #2 and #3.

[2] In story #1 the Iroquois, in contrast to most other native North Americans, planted and harvested. Their knowledge of grain and the relative quantity and variety of food, as well as their knowledge of how to store corn during the winter months [Kidd, pp. 127-131; D. Leechman, Native Tribes of Canada (Toronto: W. J. Gage & Co., Ltd., n.d.), p. 65] undoubtedly affects these three stories and colors the motifs with cultural detail; but the motifs themselves are larger than one particular culture. Note again the variety of detail but the common factor: lack of some kind of seed.

Each story describes the return of hunger as the result of an insult to the Corn Goddess by her brother-in-law. He either ridicules or insults her and actually casts away her gift of bread which is a rejection of herself. She departs from her husband and from the village, taking with her the gift of food (fertility) she had brought. Famine returns.[1] After a journey to rejoin her, the hero must spend a period of time with her--only at the end of which either he or both of them return and restore food to the village.[2] Each story, then, doubles the motif configuration of lack of seed in nature remedied by marriage, and emphasizes it further by making a rejection of food bring about a hiatus in the marriage relationship which itself results in the departure of fertility forces.

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[1] According to Jenness, The Indians of Canada, Anthropological series 15, no. 65, 7th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 137, in the Iroquois culture it was the women who were in charge of food acquisition. Such a factor would affect the understanding and appreciation of a goddess who is source of grain, but the presence of the same motif in cultures where women were not the primary agriculturists again suggests that it is more than just a reflection of sociological factors.

As was true in the consideration of journey and marriage motifs, the storyline of Ruth employs the motifs in an order different from that of the North American stories. The fruitful marriage of Elimelek is threatened by famine and eventually destroyed by the deaths of the three men, which of course separate them from their wives. The famine's end is the occasion for the journey of the two women to Bethlehem. The young woman Ruth seems to participate in the fertility rather than to cause it by her marriage, though it is only her marriage that fully restores it. Having seen that the woman is in many different ways shown to be a symbol of the land (and it a symbol for her) the return of seed to the land in 1:6 and 4:13 is a double reinforcement of the equation of marriage and fertility.

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[1] Again there are variant details. In story #1 the corn drops off the corncobs; in stories #2 and #3 it is mysteriously dipped out of the storage bins.

[2] The restoration comes about either by instruction or by his receiving and giving his people seeds to plant.

The rejection of the woman is less clear in the storyline of Ruth than it was in the Iroquois tales. I suspect, though, that both Mahlon's death and the near redeemer's refusal to redeem the field of Elimelek are rejections of Ruth.[1] As is also true in the other three stories, the rejection is ultimately the cause of the return of life. Such a paradox is more visible in Mahlon's death as serving to interrupt fertility than it is in the later rejection, where the return to fruitfulness for Ruth is furthered at once.

In all four stories the periods of marriage and their resulting fertility seem to draw upon strength gained during the times of crisis, infertility, journey, and waiting. Each story also conveys not so much a cyclical view of fertility, where the alternation between death and life is regular, as a turn that is eventually decisive: the Iroquois recital of alternation of dearth, abundance, dearth, abundance and the Hebrew narrative of a gradual return to life by stages show

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[1] Some of the commentators seek to demonstrate that the men who leave Bethlehem, those who marry foreigners and he who refuses to redeem act in some way that is wrong--evidenced by the deaths of the former and the nameless state of the latter. On the contrary, their actions do not seem to be so much wrong as not life-producing. Such a distinction may be a good place to suggest a difference between the rational logic of the story (where we can see no clear evidence that anyone's actions are reprehensible) and the more mythic logic (where the anti-hero, or opponent of life, is a projection of the forces of death).

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that the alternation is ultimately transformed to a permanent state of knowledge of agriculture, possession of seeds, secure line of male heirs. There is a point beyond which the brother's rejection of the woman--though still potentially repeatable and still a threat--is no longer so powerful a force. The stories resolve the questions of infertility decisively. It no longer matters whether the man and woman are married and in that way contributing to fertility; fertility is established and stable.

3. Identity-Search-Knowledge-Safety

Closely related to journey, marriage and fertility are four other motifs which contribute additional insight into the meaning of these seed stories. Part of search is difficulty. The journeys of the hero are actually the occasion for him to demonstrate that he is deserving of the woman, that he is worthy to marry her and aid her in releasing the gifts of fertility for the people. The tasks to which he is set test his character and strength and cunning--and sometimes his fertility as well. His safety may be threatened, his ingenuity challenged by the search on his journey to the woman. Part of the quest seems to involve questions of identity. He must establish himself as an agent of fertility, but the stories stress even more the questions surrounding the identity of the woman who embodies fertility. The range of ways in which they do this emphasizes the importance of her identity and brings out its various facets. Details from

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the stories will help clarify these points.

In each Iroquois story an early (though not very obvious) consideration is a test of the hero, the result of which is a clarification of his identity as worthy. In story #1 the hero, Gosadaya, is kind and helpful to the trees of the forest when their leader dies; in story #2 Corn Tassel tries to care for corn stalks injured through the cruelty of his brother; in story #3 the people of one village are able to fend off starvation by making a sort of ground meal from the tree bark, and the young man whose nephew the Corn Goddess marries hears her approach before she arrives. In each case there is a demonstration of the hero's character--and a demonstration which indicates his sensitivity toward nature, suggesting his basic compatibility with life forces.

The second test of each young man is his journey to rejoin his wife during the second crisis of the stories, and in each tale he must brave the dangers of nature in order to be with her and to return to his people afterwards. He is a sort of mediator who closes the gap between the life-bringing woman and the rest of his people. He gives seed to his wife in marriage and receives seed from her for his people.

Boaz is consistently presented as worthy, both by his success in nature and by his sensitivity to the presence of

Ruth.[1] The site of his success in agriculture is in fact the locus where he will give gifts of nature to her. The three main episodes of the story which feature him are each a testing of his ability to be worthy. The scene in chapter 2 shows us that he respects what seems to be her right as a widow or alien to glean in his field. In fact, he not only permits her to do so but gives her additional privileges as well. In the second testing scene he responds appropriately to her nocturnal approach to him and agrees to both her requests. The last main scene is a testing of Boaz which uses the journey *topos* familiar from the testing of the Iroquois heroes. Boaz' clever handling of Ruth's request for marriage and of Naomi's need for redemption--and in particular his devising a solution which satisfies the demands of customary practice but which also enables him to maintain all the family bonds[2]--is the ultimate test of his character. The dilemma with which the events of chapter 3 left Boaz was a difficult challenge for one who would seek not only the minimum to which he was bound but who would try to respond to larger considerations. Such a man shows himself worthy of the woman who together with him will bring a special gift of life to the people.

Even more important than the difficulties through which the hero must journey safely in order to establish the quality of his own identity is the focus of all of these stories on the identity of the woman.

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[1] Such information is given to us by the narrator, by the other characters, and by his own reactions.

[2] Sasson, *Ruth*, p. 194.

The Iroquois stories stress her role both indirectly and directly. Only in story #3 is she asked directly by the people of the village to explain who she is, where she has come from, and why she is in their midst. Her reply emphasizes the same facets of her identity stressed indirectly by other details of the story. She has been sent by the deity and by her mother to a new land and people to bring them gifts of seed. Her connections with the forces of fertility are reiterated when the rejection of bread causes her departure, which in turn brings famine to the people; likewise, a period of marriage with the hero is the cause of return of plenty to the people. The rejection of her may be a form of non-recognition of who she is[1] or at least a lack of appreciation of the significance of her gifts.[2]

That the identity of Ruth is stressed has been shown in the rhetorical features (for example, where the address to her serves to equate Boaz and Naomi, where the repetition of her epithet serves to focus her status as foreign and returned, daughter-in-law and daughter, etc.) and in content consideration (for example, her presence in the field by day and at the threshing floor by night--even though such fertility associations contrast with her barren state as a childless widow). Boaz' recognition of her and his gifts of food to her are steps toward or even prefigurements of his eventual marriage to her. Like the Corn Goddess, Ruth is associated with both life and death: she is wife of the dead and wife of the living, childless and mother; but ultimately she is associated with life. Like the Iroquois woman, Ruth is at first not recognized or else she is treated in a cavalier manner (1:21, 4:6) but is eventually recognized by the one who is most suitable to marry her.

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[1] This equivalence is stated clearly in story #1.

[2] This inference is justified from stories #2 and #3.

In all four stories the heroine also journeys--her steps being a counterpart of the more arduous journey the hero must make to her. His journey seems to be in response to hers--as can be seen in the fact that in the North American tales she guides him safely to herself,[1] and in the Hebrew story in that the initiatives of the story come from the two women. The first approach of the heroine to the hero may be hers, but the journey which secures stability is his.

The motif cluster identity-search-knowledge-safety is

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[1] There do not seem to be any real risks for the Corn Goddess, so her safety is not a factor (perhaps since she is a deity). Ruth's safety is a concern, however. She is careful to glean where she is received, to gather where she is protected, fed and accepted. Her safety during her journey to and from the threshing floor and while she is there is guarded by the good intentions of Naomi and Boaz, carefully expressed by this story--by the darkness, the privacy and perhaps her clothing.

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important in expressing the fertility concerns of the story. The union of a worthy man and woman is the goal of the story, and the fertility generated by the union is not possible until the identities are established. The lack of explicit knowledge of who the hero and heroine are delays the story--even though the period of delay (death, rejection, famine, etc.) is ultimately beneficial. All of the ways in which the identities are tested--and in fact formed--are a part of the fertility process.

4. Anger at the Deity-Disaster in Nature-Two Men

The last set of motifs to be examined in these stories is the combination that brings about and expresses death forces. Two significant points emerge from a study of these configurations: the stories about nature serve as vehicles for tension and resolution of tension between men and women and between gods and humans; and the constant reverberation between natural disaster and family strife suggests the equivalence of the two spheres. Each of the four stories has the combination of motifs, but the plots of the stories use them very differently--a difference more marked here than was the case with the other motifs. The particular manner in which the motifs are employed does not affect the basic expression of tension between men and women, humans and deities, or the equivalence of the domains of nature and family.

The three Iroquois stories show a male human being rejecting a female deity, who is the wife of his brother. This rejection within the family circle is achieved by a nature-object (bread) and has effects in nature (famine). The rejection splits the family (brother vs. brother, wife must leave husband, hero must leave people) and ruptures the unity of seed and land in nature.

The Hebrew story tells of a female human being angry at a male deity[1] for his action against her which exiled her hungry with husband and sons and returned her empty. The rejection pattern can be sensed in the death of Ruth's husband Mahlon (during a famine-induced exile) and in the decision of the unnamed redeemer to redeem the land held by the wife of his confrère.[2] The famine in nature both breaks the family unity and re-establishes it more fruitfully; the gifts of nature are the occasion for family ties and obligations to be strengthened.

As the stories show nature and family relationships to be the place where male-female, divine-human conflicts occur, so are they also the locus of reconciliation.

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[1] The Hebrew deity is almost always referred to as though he were masculine. That is suitable to the seed-field system.

[2] This pattern suggests a similarity between the gift of bread (stories #1, #2 and #3) and the field (Ruth). Perhaps Elimelek's original departure from Bethlehem is also an equivalent action.

Ruth and the Demeter-Persephone[1] Stories

The Greek and Latin materials offer a similar--and in fact a fuller--opportunity[2] to investigate some of the motifs that construct the story of the return of seed to the earth. There are four sets of motifs which seem particularly suitable for comparison with Ruth and which are generally similar to those analyzed from the Iroquois tales. As was the case in the previous section, I will begin by suggesting what seems most significant about each motif configuration and then offer supporting data. I will also offer more interpretation in reference to these motifs than I chose to do above.

1. Clothing-Safety-Flower-Sex

There is an association carefully made in all stories between the woman and the flowering aspect of nature, which suggests that their destinies are linked somehow. The action of gathering from nature is related in the stories to the taking of the woman. There is a similar parallel suggested between the woman and her clothing and the woman and her attendants, so that we can interpret her state with reference to how she appears. Far more intricate than in the Iroquois tales is the skein of detail which suggests the sameness--unity--between the woman and nature. Here, too, is a much more complex picture of the woman as a bringer of both life and death--in fact of the woman as participating in the death and destruction from which new life must spring. Each story calls attention to a balance between the woman's being caught by forces stronger than she is, against which she contends futilely, and the woman struggling successfully to make a free choice. These elements are more visible in the Greco-Roman materials than they are in Ruth; their expression is more complex and more powerful than is the relatively rational recital of Ruth's story and hence affords insight into the motifs of the Hebrew story.

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[1] For the sake of simplicity I will refer to the deities in all the versions of this myth by the names anglicized from the Greek hymn.

[2] The Greek and Latin materials seem richer and more profound than the North American tales, though this might be because the latter come to us from the notes of non-native anthropologists while the former are composed by poets, or even because western scholarship is so much more familiar with the materials of its own classical age than it is with other stories.

The stories each make a connection of the woman to a flowering object in a number of ways, leaving virtually no uncertainty that the association is an important one. Each of the Greco-Roman stories describes the scene of abduction and rape as a fertile or damp, shady, well-watered place where the goddess is gathering flowers: she is taken while she is gathering flowers; as she is taken, the flowers fall (Hymn 4 ff., Fas. 423, Met. V:385 ff.). At the stories' end, her subsequent and perpetual journeys to the same destination to which the flower led her are caused by her reaching for or accepting pomegranate seeds (Hymn 371 ff., Fas. 607-608, Met. V:534). The Homeric Hymn in particular offers further equivalents of this motif of woman equaling flower. Persephone is described by a word (*καλυκώπιδι*) likening her to a flower (8). The same metaphor is used for the daughters of Celeus (108, 178) who, like Persephone, are surprised and deceived by a deity who meets them by a shaded well (98 ff.). The child Demophoön, whose treatment at Demeter's hands is another episode parallel to the kidnap of Persephone, is roasted in the fire, suggesting an equivalence between himself and grain, fruit of the earth (238 ff.).[1] The fertile, well-watered spot and the fruit it produces are the stratagem employed to deceive the woman, as though they could attract her because of similarity and affinity--an irony to which I will return shortly.

The equivalence between Ruth and the field--expressed by the story in a number of subtle ways noted already--achieves greater significance when it is seen in relation to his motif. Her labor in the field, her falling to the earth, her receiving grain from Boaz, her approach to him as he sleeps by the heap of grain, all serve to underline the relationship between herself and the grain-bearing earth. The invitation issued to her to approach the drawn water in the field, and possibly even her bathing as a preparation for her marriage request to Boaz emphasize the same associations.[1]

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[1] K. Kerényi, "Kore," in *Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Divine Maiden*, rev. ed., edited by C. G. Jung and K. Kerényi, (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 116 (hereafter cited as Kerényi, "Kore").

A similar forging of motifs occurs in reference to the clothing of the woman and her state: Persephone's garment is torn at the time of her abduction, her belt is left floating on the water as she is carried off (*Met*. V:398, 400 ff.); she herself rends her garment as she is taken away (*Fas*. 448); Demeter rends *her* garment when she hears the cry of her daughter and searches for the young woman while clothed in a dark robe of mourning (*Hymn* 40-41). The clothing is indicative of the sexual state of the daughter, rending or tearing being the equivalent of rape and abduction. Ovid joins the flower and clothing motifs by having the flowers fall as the garment is torn--both occurring at the time of the violation (*Met*. V:398).

There are only a few references to Ruth's clothing, but they are important when seen in relation to the other three stories. At the beginning of chapter 3 part of Ruth's preparations for her journey to seek marriage from Boaz is to don a cloak (*שִׂמְלָה*); at the end of the scene Boaz pours seed into Ruth's garment(*מִטְפַּחַת*). The violence of the motif expressed in the Greek and Latin materials is absent, but the basic equivalence between the woman and a state of sexual receptivity seems clear.[1]

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[1] The fact that bathing would be a normal part of special preparations for such an occasion does not diminish the ability of the motif to have a mythic function as well.

A parallel set of references to clothing involves Boaz. Ruth's non-verbal action, which as I have noted above, is best seen as a marriage request, consists of uncovering Boaz' legs. The words which accompany the action when she performs it (though not when Naomi gives her the directions) are a request that he spread his garment over her. If it is appropriate to see Ruth's clothing as indicative of her sexual readiness, then the removing of clothing from the lower part of Boaz' body and the gesture of covering the woman with it seem to indicate a similar state of the man.[2]

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[1] More will be able to be said about Ruth's clothing when it is looked at in relation to its own canon. Here the point is that the motif of clothing indicating the sexual state of the woman is able to be seen more clearly in Ruth because it is visible in other fertility stories.

[2] The other reference to the removal of clothing in the story of Ruth comes at 4:7, where the removal of a sandal is used somehow to ratify the exchange between the two men. There are a number of questions about the verse: what does the sandal signify generally (exchange of land? release of one person from an obligation toward another person?); what specifically (sandal and foot as related to territory walked upon? sandal and foot as symbolic of male-female sexual relationship?); who is giver and who is receiver in this particular transaction? Carmichael, pp. 321-333, drawing on traditional understanding of the gesture, indicates his belief that it is a clear reference to the severing of ties between the woman and her would-be (would-have-been) levirate husband. However, if not Ruth but the redemption right to the field is what is exchanged between the two men, the symbolism would lean rather toward the idea of possession of land and surrender of that right. Of course, as has been mentioned several times already, the woman and the field are aspects of the same symbol complex, so even if the rational referent is the field of Elimelek, a more mythic connotation is the figure of the woman. Boaz either duplicates the

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The safety motif in all four stories, centered on the young woman, can also be seen in relation to sexual concerns. Each of the Greek and Latin tales emphasizes the presence of young women attendants with the goddess. She is not alone when her ravisher appears--or at least the narrative shows that precautions were taken that she not be alone.[1] She also cries out for help when Hades appears, an indication of her lack of complicity with his intent.[2] The stress on Ruth's safety and on her staying close by the other young women, often a puzzle to scholars, receives some clarification when seen in relation to the use of the motif in these other three stories. Not only Ruth's safety but her reputation as a woman careful of her own safety and modesty is suggested. The companionship of the young women of Boaz with Ruth functions as a chastity motif. When the story employs the motif to send Ruth alone to Boaz, sexual availability is surely the meaning from the motif, though the rational plot of the story somewhat dilutes the impact.

Each aspect of the motif configuration leads us to see the woman as the equivalent of the flowering object, to

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uncovering of his foot action seen more clearly in chapter 3, or else he receives a sandal for his foot/that with which to possess the field.

[1] For a discussion of this attendance motif see Nagler, Spontaneity, pp. 64 ff.

[2] Such a detail as the cry for help may reflect a cultural factor also. E.g., in Dt. 22:24-27 the cry or its absence is an important factor in judging a case of sexual misconduct.

recognize the sexual state of the woman (and the man) reflected by clothing, and to view the presence of companions as a sign of chastity. The Greek story in particular helps show the struggle or tension expressed in these motifs. The young woman is taken as she herself is taking what has flowered--eagerness to gather them drawing her away from her companions (Hymn 4 ff., Met. V: 391 ff.), distracting her from the approach of Hades. She is vulnerable not only because she is like the flower, but also because she is like the ravisher. The stratagem is not arbitrary but is highly suitable to the nature and actions of the woman. The mythic motif level suggests she is not as passive a victim as the rational plotline would suggest. She is in some senses a designer of her own destiny as well as a pawn. The plucking of the flower is a violation--but a necessary one for further fruitfulness to occur. Here, too, the maiden and the flower are similar. The paradox gives depth to the motif.

Ruth, much more clearly on the plot level, but also on the motif level, can be seen as reflecting both struggle against a destiny and responsibility for its design. Her gathering of grain is part of the events that lead to her being married; her clothing (and Boaz') reflects her willingness to be married to Boaz; and her leaving the company of women (the women workers and Naomi) and meeting Boaz at the threshing floor all balance her subservience to Boaz and her docility to the plans of her elders. The mutuality between the man and the woman, the efforts of the woman to take responsibility for her own life, the initiative involved in her participation in fertility are all necessary factors in the fruitfulness. The struggle and the paradox are necessary too.

2. Food-Sex-Death-Fertility

Closely related to the clothing-flower-safety-sex confirmation of motifs are the elements of eating and fasting and their relation to sex and death and fertility. Both stories express the belief that both eating and fasting are related to the life cycle, not only on the obvious level--where famine brings death and return of seed brings life--but on a more paradoxical level, where the actions of engaging in sexual relations or refraining from doing so, hinder or release basic life forces. Once again it is the rich texture of motifs in the Greek hymn that is particularly illuminating for the Hebrew story. The primary place where all three of the Greco-Roman stories focus the relationship is at the point in the narrative where Persephone is about to be returned to her mother. She either plucks for herself or accepts from her husband some pomegranate seeds and eats them in the realm of the dead (*Hymn* 370 ff., *Met*. V:534, *Fas*. 607). The plucking of seeds duplicates the original action of hers which led to her encounter with sex and death.

The red, seed-like object is a clear enough marriage symbol,[1] and eating is made equivalent to sex: the seed of Hades enters the woman. Eating, which is normally a way of propagating life, is something Persephone has not done since she entered the land of the dead. Her absence and her fasting have been paralleled on the earth above her, where not only her mother Demeter has fasted while she searched for her daughter, but earth itself has lacked seed and grain as well--as have the human beings and deities (Hymn 47 ff., 197 ff., 305 ff., Fas. 534 ff., 618 ff., Met. V. V:474 ff.). Persephone's choice to eat is a deeply paradoxical act--to ingest or receive living seed in the land of the dead would seem futile. But Persephone's choice--ignorant and unthinking though it ostensibly is--serves to release the grip of death on nature: she returns to her mother, and at the place of their reunion the furrows are laden, grain is on the ground, sheaves are gathered (Hymn 453-456).[2] Her action or condition causes the return of life to nature, and the taking of the pomegranate seeds ensures that her original journey across the waters and into the realm of the dead and her reappearance in the world of the living will continue to be repeated, causing the death

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[1] K. Kerényi, Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter, trans. R. Mannheim (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 137-140 (hereafter cited as Kerényi, Eleusis); T. W. Allen, W. R. Halliday, E. E. Sikes, ed., The Homeric Hymns, 2d ed. (Amsterdam: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 169. The motif of pregnancy as a result of eating seeds occurs occasionally in classical myths, though not here.

[2] Such a description is possibly visible in the description of activities being carried on in Boaz' field, chapter 2.

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and germination of seed to continue their cycle. Persephone experiences the alternation of taking and being taken, fasting and eating, and in that experience causes the alternation for the rest of us. Like most grain deities, Persephone remains Queen of the Dead.[1] The ambivalence of the motif of the woman choosing, but choosing in ignorance of the consequences of her decision, sustains the theme commented upon earlier, where the woman is at least partially responsible for her fate--and in this case for the return of life.

The fasting motif is visible at several other points in the Greek material: Demeter fasts while her daughter is missing (*Hymn* 48 ff.; *Met*. V:474 ff.; *Fas*. 534) and refuses to return to Persephone's father while Persephone is detained by her ravisher; Doso escapes from her captors while they are preparing a meal--that is before breaking her fast (*Hymn* 127 ff.);[2] the boy Demophoön is not fed while he is in Demeter's care (*Hymn* 235 ff.). In each case the fast ends with an increase in the ability to nurture: Demeter returns grain, Doso hires herself out as nurse, Demophoön will be a source of strength to his people.

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[1] J. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), p. 368.

[2] Demeter tells Celeus and Metaneira that her name is Doso and identifies herself as a woman who was kidnapped but escaped her captors and has now arrived at their home. Her tale is a blend of truth and lie, and like similar tales in Homer, communicates symbolic truth.

The hymn also indicates that the pattern of excess and dearth of seed encountered in the story is the occasion or cause for Demeter's gift to human beings of the Mysteries, with their consolation in the face of death and promise of life in spite of death.

In the story of Ruth the same basic relationship between life and death, eating and absence of food, sexual fulfillment and continence is expressed, though in a very different arrangement of details. The famine--which serves as an equivalent of fasting--is at least the remote cause of death in the story. The Fields of Moab turn out to be the equivalent of the land of the dead, for three of those who flee eastward to avoid famine eat there and die and so remain there. Death is not the only contribution of Moab, though; for the marriage (giving of seed) by the (dead) man Mahlon to Ruth is also the source of new life, though not immediately. The storyteller is careful that we understand fertility in nature to be a gift of the Lord; but Ruth's participation in Bethlehem's return to fruitfulness enables her to bring to it an even greater fruitfulness than the return of food, since she provides a child, an heir, a king--salvation for humankind.

Ruth's relationship with the dead is also paralleled by the relationship she comes to experience with Boaz. He is the one who proffers seed to her three times; from him she accepts it and eats it at least once in his land. Boaz' gifts of seed to Ruth are both rationally and mythically related to marriage: eating is equivalent to sexual relations. Having already shown us the relationship between Ruth's conception and both Boaz and Mahlon, the storyteller is careful to maintain that her conception, Ruth's ultimate contribution to fruitfulness, is from the Lord. Like Persephone, Ruth draws life from death, the land of the dead produces life; famine gives way to fruitfulness. The period of barrenness, death and continence which Ruth experiences is eventually ended as she once again takes seed, receives seed, and brings forth life.

3. Journey-Foreign Land-Separation-Unity

Central to these stories as it was to the Iroquois tales is the motif of the journey of the woman from a land that is familiar to her to a strange land--a journey that involves both separation and unity. The woman's journey is the cause of fertility. The journey causes fertility both because it is marked by death and devastation and because it is an arrival at a new home. It is marked by deprivation of seed on one level, but the journey itself is also a search for seed on another level. The journey is the differentiation of the young woman from the mother and the establishment of her identity as a bringer of life herself. The separation is not complete, however, since in differentiating herself, the daughter becomes more closely bound to her mother and to all other women. As a result of both relationships, the nature of the woman as a bearer of life is maintained.

The journey in the Greek and Roman stories is a double one. Persephone journeys to the land of the dead; Demeter goes in search of her. Persephone's anguish at departing from the earth is matched by Demeter's efforts to see that she returns there. Persephone's eagerness to get away from her husband's home is paralleled by Demeter's steadfast determination to avoid the home of Zeus and the other deities (Hymn 90 ff., 314ff., 385 ff.). Demeter's mourning and fasting reflect and express Persephone's anguish: both women cry out (Hymn 20, 49; Fas. 447, 456, 461, 483; Met.V. 396 ff.), both alter their clothing (Hymn 40 ff.; Fas. 448, Met.V:398ff.), both fast (Hymn 48, 393 ff.; Fas. 534, 603 ff.; Met. V:474 ff., 534 ff.). The story shows here the basic unity of the women: the journeys are similar, the experiences are similar, one feels for and with the other.[1]

The journeys separate the two women as well, though, and reflect the double role of the woman as mother and wife and as daughter. Persephone is torn between these two ways of being, as her journey to her husband's home means a separation from her mother. The daughter is begotten, becomes complete, separates, bears, etc.[1] Ultimately Persephone is allowed to be both wife and daughter--and more than allowed--it is her choice that maintains both aspects of her nature, a reflection of her nature on the human level and on the level of nature: she gives and receives life. The journey of Persephone becomes her home. Death and devastation is the occasion for consolation and peace. To lose and regain is the prototypical human experience of death and new growth. The home of Persephone--her alternation between mother and husband--is fruitful.

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[1] There is another sense, too, in which the journeys can be seen to be parallel. There are other versions of this myth where Demeter herself is ravished by Poseidon, and so the rape of Persephone by Hades is a participation in the same destiny: Kerényi, Eleusis, pp 33 ff. Demeter's anger is over both violations, which in some sense occur in her own person. Kerényi, "Kore," pp. 122-123, describes the character of the mother goddess: "To enter into the figure of Demeter means to be pursued, to be robbed, raped, fail to understand, to rage and grieve, but then to get everything back and be born again."

Once again the Demophoön episode provides a doublet for this complex role of the begotten. In that shorter account as in the central one, a deity abducts a child from its parent, seeking to remove it from its mother's world to the deity's own realm. The kidnapping is partially thwarted by the outraged mother. The midpoint of or the balance within the abduction process is that the child's state will be a source of life to its people. The child no longer belongs to either realm completely but somehow more fruitfully joins both.

The two abduction episodes also reflect upon the identity of the captors, the mother and husband of Persephone.

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[1] Kerényi, "Kore," pp. 105-106.

Hades' identity is not known to Demeter during her search for her daughter. The disguise by which he, lord of the dead, takes his bride is paradoxically life-related: at his request earth buds forth a flower. He also shows himself to be clever and strong, and witnesses attest that he is a worthy husband for Persephone (*Hymn* 83 ff., *Met*. V:526 ff., *Fas*. 597).

Demeter's identity is likewise unknown to Metaneira while the goddess serves as nurse to the boy, and she, vegetation deity, paradoxically disguises herself as an old crone, making use of a stratagem of infertility. Both the husband (death) and the mother (life) are reflected in the identity of the daughter. Each is able to attract her by appealing to opposite elements within her nature by their paradoxical stratagems.

In the Hebrew story the two women make a similar journey, in that each is separated from her husband by death: unchosen celibacy, rather than violent sex, is the weapon of death here. Each woman makes a journey from her own country to a strange land, a journey from the land of death to a land holding the promise of life, in response to a dearth of seed. The journeys are the same, too, insofar as the road from Moab to Bethlehem is taken by both.

The journey separates the older woman from the younger one as well. Naomi seeks to rebuff Ruth, to discourage her daughter-in-law from accompanying her, in an effort to make

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her external state of desolation match her interior emptiness.[1] Naomi's unwillingness to have Ruth accompany her lasts throughout the journey and finds expression in her words to the women of Bethlehem, when she states that she has been returned home empty. The journey of Ruth--her return and her homecoming--is both her choosing to go with a woman in a man's world, where life depends on men,[2] and her finding rest in the home of a husband. Both journeys are rather extended for her, though bracketed by the even longer search of Naomi to find the fulness of life in her arms once more. The ambivalence of Ruth's path is also visible in the paradox of having to assert her own will against Naomi's (separation) in order to accompany her (unity),[3] and by the shorter journeys of chapters 2 and 3 which have her crossing back between mother and husband before finding rest with both.

The threats to the return of life for Ruth and to her coming to rest within her mother's and husband's homes are danger spots to be avoided-- close calls-- and function more at the level of plot than at the mythic level. The threat to her following Naomi comes when Naomi points to her own infertility as a reason for Ruth's turning away from her. Ruth's full relationship with Naomi and with Boaz is threatened by an unnamed adversary who would take the field

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[1] Rauber, "Ruth," p. 60. [2] Trible, p. 173.

[3] Ibid, p. 172.

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of Elimelek from his immediate family.[1]

4. Anger at the Deity-Disaster in Nature

Both stories raise the question of the relationship between the gods and humans: are the actions of the gods toward the humans arbitrary and harmful? How do the human beings react to the actions of the gods toward them? In these stories nature is the place where such struggles occur, and it is also the place of reconciliation. It is the role of the woman both to express anger at the deity and to take responsibility to be reconciled.

Demeter expresses anger at Zeus, Hera and Gaia for their roles in the abduction of Persephone. Demeter's withdrawal from their company brings about the devastation upon the earth (Hymn 305 ff.). Her efforts to withdraw Persephone from her husband threaten the cycle of life; and it is only her partial failure to do so that leads to the fruitful, perpetually repeated journey of the young woman. The excessive flowering results in a dearth of seed. Human beings are caught in the middle of the struggle between the deities and find themselves powerless to resist. These sentiments are expressed by the daughters of Celeus and Metaneira: "...[W]hat the gods send us, we mortals bear perforce, although we suffer; for they are much stronger than we" (Hymn 147-8), and by Demeter as well: "Witless are you mortals, and dull to foresee your lot, whether good or evil, that comes upon you" (Hymn 256-7). It is only when the deities have decided that they have been deprived of sacrifice long enough that Zeus acts to bring the crisis to an end.

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[1] Evelyn-White, p. 291, says in a footnote to the first line in the hymn where the ravished is alluded to that the Greeks feared to name Pluto directly and preferred to mention him instead with one of his descriptive titles.

The exchange of Metaneira and Demeter over the latter's treatment of Demophoön is instructive. Metaneira acts suddenly and instinctively to protect the life of her son, lashing out in fear and anger at the one who would threaten his life. Demeter in turn rebukes her for her ignorant and clumsy action which thwarts the designs for the goddess--designs that were to bring about good for the boy and for his people. A single child, buried in the fire, was to serve as a source of food for all: treatment at Demeter's hands is life-giving. Metaneira's misguided efforts to regain her child are not completely destructive, for they are the occasion for Demeter's gift of the Mysteries at Eleusis. The desire of Metaneira to preserve her child is, of course, a shadow of the larger struggle of Demeter to regain her daughter--an effort not totally in the interests of fertility either. Like Metaneira, Demeter is only partially successful in thwarting the plans of the gods, and the good that they seem to have intended is achieved nonetheless. Demeter becomes a model for human beings in their fear and loss. Her initiation to the Mysteries is losing and finding her daughter.[1] Demeter's participation is a guarantee of life without fear of death:[2]

> Once upon a time a path to the Underworld was opened. Persephone was the first who took this path into the darkness as booty and bride of the subterranean god with whom she celebrated her marriage as marriages are celebrated here on earth and to whom she bore a child as women bear children here above. Since then the world has been what it is for us mortals: full of plant food and full of hope--of hope because the way she travelled has led to her ever since.[3]

In the Biblical story it is disaster in nature which leads to the loss of offspring, a loss against which Naomi rages to God.[4] Her discouraging speech to her two daughters-in-law, which if successful would have deprived her of Ruth and Obed, is also framed with references to the harshness of the deity: her first reference (1:9) is ironic, suggesting that the two foreign women's kindness must serve as pattern for the deity's kindness, and the second is more direct (1:13).[5] Naomi is powerless to reverse the actions of the deity, but she can object. Like the other two women, she comes to participate in the return of life, not simply to acquiesce silently with the plans of the divine order. Nature reflects her reconciliation with the Lord: she is given not only the seed whose disappearance led to death in the first place, but she is also given a new son in place of her dead sons and a daughter dearer to her than seven sons. Restoration and reconciliation are complete.

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[1] Kerényi, Eleusis, p. 24.

[2] Ibid., p. 15.

[3] Ibid., p. 169.

[4] Sasson, Ruth, pp. 26-27, suggests that the vocabulary and construction Naomi uses in her speech of 1:13 is used elsewhere always for the punishment of the evildoer. Naomi is not an evildoer, but simply a human being caught by the apparently arbitrary act of a deity who can withhold life or return it (1:6).

[5] Trible, p. 170.

The use of motifs in these stories will serve as a preparation for investigation of similar ones in the biblical stories of Rebekah and Tamar.

CHAPTER V

INVESTIGATION OF MOTIFS OF THE STORY OF RUTH IN RELATION TO ITS OWN CANON

The focus on motifs in the story of Ruth, their relationship to fertility symbolism, and their contribution to meaning continues in this chapter. The investigation has shown that stories whose underlying symbolism is related to seed and field concerns use similar motifs to articulate that symbolism. The motifs of these tales are interrelated, then, and can contribute richness and meaning to one another. The task of this chapter is to see how a study of some of the same motifs whose meaning has already been explored can communicate even more intensely when they occur within a set of literature which has its own associations and allusions. It will then be possible to add the resonances evoked within the canons to which the story of Ruth belongs to the meaning suggested already.

The material for this investigation divides into three sections. The first section will show how two Hebrew stories from the set of twenty tales already used for comparison are generally similar enough to the story of Ruth so that the motifs from all three can be used as a point of entry to other Hebrew materials. The first section will treat the three

Hebrew stories to a similar sort of investigation as was applied to the Iroquois and Greco-Roman materials. The second part of the chapter will investigate how the meaning of the same motifs can be intensified when they are studied within the confines of a common language and literature. Additional meaning that is part of the story of Ruth becomes visible both when its motifs can been seen in relation to those of the two stories similar to it in general subject matter and when the motifs reveal its less obvious connections with other narratives. A third section will suggest some ways in which the specifically Christian part of the Biblical canon can contribute meaning to the story of Ruth, and Ruth to the New Testament as well. The main points to be illustrated are best given at the beginning of each section rather than here. A general summary of the conclusions of this chapter and of the three preceding it will serve as conclusion.

Genesis 24, 38 and Ruth

In order both to continue the study of fertility motifs and to broaden the base from which to interpret seed and field symbolism in the set of literature to which Ruth belongs, it is appropriate to take from the set of comparative materials already in use two Hebrew tales, The Wooing of Rebekah and The Motherhood of Tamar. The study of these two tales and their relation to the story of Ruth will be structured in such a way as to continue the discussion of the fertility motifs begun in the last chapter of this paper and to show that the three stories are similar enough for some of the motifs of all three (rather than of Ruth alone) to be used as a base for further investigation.

The following points will be demonstrated from the study of the motifs of these three Hebrew stories:

1) Once again the journey is a crucial motif which expresses a number of important aspects related to fertility. The journey of the man--either the servant who represents Abraham and Isaac, or Judah going first away from his brothers and later to a sheep-shearing, Elimelek's family going toward a source of food and Boaz going to field and threshing floor and city gate all emphasize the needy state of the man. His journey is always directed toward a source of fertility.

2) The journeys of the woman are even more important. Each woman must make a journey from the place where she is found--from her foreignness--to the land or home of her husband. The journey she makes is the cause of fertility, of the release of life forces. Rebekah must leave Mesopotamia, Tamar must leave her ancestral home, Ruth must leave Moab in order to be effective as a bearer of life. The foreign land is in one way a source of fertility, in that it is the home of the woman, but it is not to be the place of fertility itself.

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3) In each story the end point of the journey is the same--life is renewed by the birth of offspring and/or by marriage which will lead to the renewal of the line of Abraham.

4) The man's identity receives some focus: a servant represents Isaac, Rebekah questions Isaac's identity when she sees him. The question of which man will be husband to Tamar and Ruth--and who will be able to redeem their barren and alien state and beget children in them is important. Each hero must overcome some obstacles to his goal of producing an heir, difficulties which threaten to prolong infertility.

5) The identity of the woman is crucial. In spite of appearances which could suggest the contrary, she must somehow demonstrate that she is a bearer of life. Rebekah proffers water, Tamar aligns her time ~~of fertility~~ with nature's season of gathering, Ruth may actually do both--if her name signifies refreshment and her arrivals (general and specific) coincide with the time of harvest.

6) In each story the woman's clothing and the gifts given to her signify her state. Each of these motifs contributes to her identity.

7) Each of the three women journeys between her mother's house and her husband's--but rejoins her mother in giving birth to a son, rejoins her husband in providing a male heir.

8) In each story there is some emphasis on the relationship of the woman to the land. On the one hand she is foreign to it and her coming makes it fertile; on the other hand she is

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home with the land, so that she and it are the same; and her husband is the one who arrives.

9) The stress on identities of the man and the woman in each story shows that they are well-suited to be husband and wife. Rebekah and Isaac are bound by kinship and wealth; Tamar and Jacob are drawn together by mutual need; Ruth and Boaz' suitability has been commented upon earlier and will be noted again later. Each story has foils, which help emphasize the importance of the actual hero and heroine coming together successfully.

10) In each story some sort of stratagem--and always one that is life-related--is necessary to get the correct man and woman together. Tamar and Ruth take the initiative to link their lives with Judah's and Boaz'; the servant of Isaac devises a way to find Rebekah. The fact that a stratagem is necessary indicates some lack or dissonance between the two sexes, the struggle to bridge the gap being the very tension needed in order to produce life. The stratagem in the story is one way by which the woman's destiny as active and passive, as designer of her own destiny and victim of others' plans, is discussed.

11) In each narrative the threat to the fulfillment of life purposes in the story comes from a man: Rebekah's brother and father suggest she delay; Tamar's male in-laws all act inadequately; the deaths of Ruth's in-laws and the threat of the nearer redeemer all threaten the return of life. However, in each story there are also patterns of

abstinence, fasting, mourning, etc., by which the men and women make themselves worthy to release life.

The Wooing of Rebekah and the Story of Ruth

The initial crisis which begins the story of Rebekah and Isaac (Gen. 24: 1-9) is overshadowed by a situation of prosperity: Abraham is wealthy; he has been blessed in every way, even finally by the birth of a son. But he is an old man, his wife is dead, his son is unmarried. The land in which he and Isaac dwell--though certainly part of Abraham's blessing--is also a threat to the life of the son that Abraham has fathered with such difficulty and amid such adverse circumstances and to the blessings that are to come through that son. The threat from the land is a double one: Isaac must not leave the land to get a wife, but he must not marry a woman from the land of Canaan either.[1] This paradoxical demand requires two mediators. A servant must represent Isaac and make the journey to find the correct woman. The woman herself must be both family and foreign: related to Abraham through the people he had left, and a stranger to the land of Canaan. Like the crisis that begins the story of Ruth, a crisis related to the land and to the needs of a family necessitates a journey to a distant land.

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[1] This particular narrative is not put together with as much tension as is more often the case with the Yahwist (whose story it seems to be), and it is easy to slide by the dilemma posed to Abraham because it is not emphasized except by the oath. What could have been presented as a puzzle or test is clear from the outset, due to the insight of Abraham. The story will center tension at a different point in the narrative.

The first response of the characters to the threat of life from the land is the journey of the servant to the foreign land to search for the woman (vv. 10-21). He brings with him wealth from Abraham's land, all of which will be necessary for his task: camels, jewelry, clothing. The setting at which his journey ends is a watering place near or at the edge of the city: a logical stopping place for a traveller with camels and a logical place for a young woman of the town to visit in the evening, journeying from her mother's home and back again--but also a mythically significant scene: the meeting of the "marriage agent" and the young woman at the well-watered place. Once the servant has seen the young woman he must next discern whether or not she is the person intended by God, suitable for the life-related purposes of Abraham and Isaac. In order to ascertain the identity of the young woman, the servant devises a stratagem which not only identifies her but his own ingenuity[1] and the will of the divine ordainer as well. The woman offers water of refreshment to the servant and to his camels--an offer which signifies her as generous and worthy on the level of plot and as a bearer of life on the symbolic level. Her offer of water signals us that she will be the bride and mother. The narrator adds a bit of tension to this scene by sharing with the audience the indecision of the servant, who makes up his mind while the camels are drinking.

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[1] On the logical level of plot, the servant has replaced the suitor; on the mythic level of the story they are equivalent.

The first movement toward resolution of the story's crisis occurs in vv. 22-23. The servant gives rings and bracelets to the woman, signifying her as betrothed. Her identity is also emphasized verbally: the question she is asked[1] elicits from her the details of her parentage and kinship with Abraham's family (for Rebekah, like Ruth, is related to Abraham through his Mesopotamian family) and also testifies to the worth and wealth of her father's house. The servant gets more than he asked for: not only does the first woman he addresses respond appropriately, but she is also beautiful and a relative of his master.[2] The response of the servant to her information identifies Abraham and Isaac as wealthy (by the gifts) and as worthy (not forsaken by God). Rebekah's family and Isaac's side of it are designated as well-matched on a number of levels. The young woman then completes her short journey, retracing her steps from the place where she met the servant to her mother's household. Her brother Laban recognizes her identity (betrothed) and the giver's identity (wealthy) both from her appearance and from her words of explanation.

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[1] "'Whose daughter are you?'" recalls the questions Boaz asks of Ruth: "'Whose is this young woman?' (2:5), 'Who are you?'" (3:9), and his address to her: "'my daughter'" (2:8; 3:10,11).

[2] G. von Rad, Genesis: A Commentary, trans. J. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 251.

The second small cycle of response of characters and movement toward resolution begins in vv. 33-49, a narrative doublet of details, most of which we as audience know, though their recitation adds a bit of detail.[1] The servant refuses to eat until he is certain his search has really ended. The details he gives to the family include reference to the birth of Isaac to his parents when they were old and to the wealth of Abraham--both pieces of information testifying to Abraham's fruitfulness. He also manages in his speech to repeat the factors of the woman's identity: she is both foreign and family, of the land of Abraham and not of it; her worthiness is attested both by her own behavior and by the approval of the divine ordainer.

The second movement toward resolution (vv. 50-54) comes in the words of the woman's male relatives, who acquiesce to the will of the ordainer. Gifts for both herself and her family solemnize the occasion. The family reciprocates with hospitality; the servant eats and drinks with Rebekah's family and spends the night there.

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[1] The repetition underscores the details. Von Rad, p. 253, notes that the details about the absolute ban on Isaac's journey to Mesopotamia are tactfully omitted.

The crisis of the story--slight though it seems both in the story itself and by comparison with other crises met by the patriarchs and their wives--occurs in vv. 55-58a. The dilemma is conveyed with both logical and mythic significance will Rebekah stay with her mother or go to her husband? Here only does the story show any tension between human desires and divine design. Not anger but persuasion and threat of delay are the temptations posed to compliance of humans with deity.

The resolution comes in vv. 58b-67, as the woman, having herself made the decision to go, starts on her journey from her mother's home to go to a new land and a new husband. Her family speaks a fertility blessing over her (recalling the one spoken by the citizens of Bethlehem to Boaz). She sets out with female attendants and with a nurse. When she sees her husband in the field at evening she jumps to the ground, ascertains his identity, and veils herself. Isaac takes her to his mother's tent,[1] and she becomes his wife, ending her journey. Rebekah becomes the mother of Jacob, through whom the line of Abraham will continue (though that episode is not related in this story).

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[1] The reference to the text is important, as Von Rad points out, p. 254, to suggest continuity with the earlier ancestress. It is also a detail that serves to mark Rebekah's journey from the home of her own mother to that of her mother-in-law. The exact syntactic relationship between the phrase "Sarah his mother" and "he brought her to the tent" is not clear.

A few additional comments can help bring out the relationship of this story to those looked at earlier.[1] The importance of the fact that Isaac is not to reverse the journey of Abraham and leave the land and yet is not to marry any of his inhabitants, reinforced as it is by the servant's oath and by the fact that he is released from the oath should its terms be impossible to meet, highlights the importance of the woman who must be the one to travel if the people of Abraham is to live: the continuity of the line depends on her journey. Like Sarah whose tent she enters and like a number of women who will come after her, her gift to the Hebrew people is her identity as somehow alien. The center of the story focuses upon her identity in a number of ways, aligning within it her family's and her own character, her physical appearance, attributes and deeds, her choice between her mother's house and her mother-in-law's tent, her status as daughter and bride. The field is the place where bridegroom and bride encounter each other; it is the place where the woman arrives home, the end of her journey.

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[1] Commentators also make some general comments about the story along the lines of motif interpretation. E.g., J. Van Seters, Abraham in History and Tradition (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 243-46, says that it carries out the folk theme of "man obtaining a wife with no difficulty" (spoken from the perspective of a man with servants!) and the more theological theme of divine providence; W. M. Roth, "The Wooing of Rebekah: A Tradition-Critical Study of Genesis 24," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 34 (1972): 181-184, finds it exemplifying the themes "servant fulfills mission patiently and well" and "good wife"; Hals, pp. 44-45, sees the theme of the deity acting from the shadows and affecting even small details from a hidden position; G. H. Cohn, "New Insights into Old Texts," in Verkenningen in een stroomgebied: Proeven van oud testamentisch on der zoek (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 1974), pp. 113-114, says it tells of the continuity of the family maintained by God alone, who is responsible for Israel's existence, and it illustrates the theme of the matriarch coming to Israel of her own decision and marrying a relative. Cohn also lists some of the verbal parallels between the stories of Rebekah and Ruth.

The Motherhood of Tamar and the Story of Ruth

The story of Tamar begins (Gen. 38:1-10) with the separation of a family, since Judah, like Elimelek, separates from his kin and goes to dwell among foreigners. He marries a foreign woman and is soon the father of three sons. The eldest of these sons marries a foreign woman from the place where his family is living.[1] The details about the levirate nature of the second son's marriage and the narrator's information that the sons' deaths are both a result of some evil deed in the sight of the Lord ought not obscure the basic similarity between the opening crisis here and that described in the first five verses of Ruth: journey of family member(s) to a foreign place, marriage to foreign women, marriage of two sons, deaths of two sons, childless widow remaining.

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[1] The story is not explicit about whether Tamar, like Judah's wife, is a foreigner. J. A. Emerton, "An Examination of a Recent Structuralist Interpretation of Genesis 38," Vetus Testamentum 26 (1976): 90, says that most commentators assume that Tamar is foreign, and Emerton criticizes the structuralist interpretation for presuming the opposite. As far as the saga of which Genesis 38 is a part is concerned, anyone outside the family of Abraham is in some sense a foreigner.

The first response of the characters comes (v. 11) when Judah advises Tamar to return to her father's house to wait until the other brother is old enough to marry her--a suggestion offered ironically by Naomi after she has tried also to send her daughters-in-law back to their parents' homes.[1] The narrative pauses here briefly, leaving us to expect that the third brother will be the one to solve the problem of raising an heir for the dead.[2] The solution that did not seem feasible in the story of Ruth seems likely to be so here.

The first intensification comes in v. 12, where the death of Judah's wife is the occasion for the escalation of the action. Judah's situation of celibacy is suddenly the same as Tamar's--and Naomi's and Ruth's. The time setting now mentioned--sheep-shearing--provides both the occasion for a journey and the allusion to the fruitfulness of nature.

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[1] Alter, "Literary Approach," p. 75, notes that the continual use of the term daughter-in-law to identify Tamar, superfluous on one level since presumably we can manage to remember that is what she is, functions in a more subtle way to remind us that Judah has obligations toward Tamar by virtue of this relationship.

[2] A. Olrik, "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative," in Dundes, Folklore, p. 133, stresses the "incredible frequency" of the use of the number three for repetition. "When a folklorist comes upon a three, he thinks, as does a Swiss who catches sight of his Alps again, 'Now I am home!'"

The second movement of response comes with vv. 13-23. Tamar's response to the knowledge that her father-in-law is making a journey serves to continue underscoring the similarity between them already suggested by their widowed states, since she journeys forth to intercept him. His blunt urgency when he sees her, however, highlights the contrast with his earlier suggestion that she go off home and wait unmarried until his third son grow up.[1] Her disguise--or more properly, her garb which also serves as a disguise--contrasts with his handing over to her his signet and cord, signs of his identity.[2] Judah's earlier slowness to act, followed by decisive action once he has been approached by a veiled woman, recalls Boaz. The gateway as the place of decisive action, the fertility setting, the informing of the daughter-in-law by others, her journey from her home to meet her "husband" and the focus on identity of the man and woman all serve to link the two narratives. In both cases, too, the men give the women gifts of produce: grain for Ruth, the pledge of a kid for Tamar. Both women return to their houses to await the result of their encounters. The description of Judah's efforts to pay his debt and redeem his personal property are not only humorous but also serve to continue the stress on the identities of the man and woman.

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[1] Alter, "Literary Approach," p. 75. He also points out how such a detail as the brisk and matter-of-fact tone of the narrator's description of Judah's mourning for his wife contrasts with the description of Jacob's mourning for Joseph, given in the preceding chapter of Genesis.

[2] E. A. Speiser, Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1964), p. 298.

The crisis of the narrative (vv. 24-26) is occasioned by Tamar's pregnancy and by Judah's conclusion that she is therefore guilty of harlotry. Just as the spring of the trap is the identification in a public forum of Boaz as husband for Ruth and levirate father to a son, identity of Judah as the father is the spring here--though as a result of a quite different plot arrangement. Tamar produces the evidence of the identity of the father of her child(ren); Judah identifies himself as less worthy than Tamar,[1] presumably because he delayed in providing her with a husband (or a man) to perform the levirate.[2]

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[1] Tamar's correct action is again contrasted with his self-righteous accusation that *she* must have prostituted *herself* only a short time after *his* unsuccessful hunt for *his* signet, cord and staff.

[2] Von Rad, p. 353, concludes that Judah's injustice lay in the false implication as much as in his action, since what he said would be a temporary arrangement was turning into a permanent one. G. W. Coats, "Widow's Rights: A Crux in the Structure of Genesis 38, "*Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34 (1972): 463, agrees, but also raises the question of what rights of Tamar's may have been violated. Without trying to articulate legal custom from this narrative or to read detailed law into the story, it still seems reasonable to assume that either Tamar had the right to be provided with a husband or children, or that Er had the right to be provided with a son through some male relative or associate. Coats points out references to indicate that in seeking rest and security for Ruth, Naomi need not be seeking marriage *per se*.

As was true in the conclusion of Ruth, there is in the conclusion to this tale (vv. 27-30) female attendance at the birth and naming of the sons--all three of whom are ancestors of David.

A few additional points can further clarify the manner in which the narrative's fertility motifs function. The motif cluster foreign woman-journey-marriage-fertility occurs, emphasizing once again, though by a different plot arrangement, that the journey of a foreign woman and her sexual liaison[1] with a man of the line of Abraham eventually brings fertility to the land (although we need to read farther in order to get the full information). Tamar may be the inverse of Ruth and Rebekah: not foreign to the land of Canaan, but of alien stock. Tamar does not make a journey into a new land, but like Ruth and Rebekah she does travel from her parents' home to her husband--and she makes the trip more than once. As was true in Gen. 24, there is no infertility in nature, just signs of prosperity as evidenced by Judah's journey to shear sheep and possibly by his staff, cord and signet.[2] The time of productivity in nature is paralleled by the fertility of Tamar, who conceives at once. Once again contrast is suggested by the three brothers and two couples who have not yet been able to produce new stock. Even Shelah's youthfulness is a reinforcement of the infertility theme.

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[1] Von Rad, p. 356, finds the story's ending unsatisfactory, in that it does not tell us whose wife Tamar was. I am not sure such a detail is important to the fructification theme, and at any rate the fact that we are not given the detail suggests it may not be very important.

[2] The staff, cord and signet are tokens of a responsible man, according to Speiser, p. 298.

The motifs of disaster in family relationships and anger of the deity mark the narrative. The disorder in family relationships is visible in Onan's relationship with Tamar and Er, and in the fact of Shelah's continence too.[1] The primary disorder is Judah's failure to act. The potential disaster of lack of heirs for Er (or possibly for Judah himself) is remedied by the initiative of Tamar and the unwitting co-operation of Judah. The anger of the deity blazes directly at Onan for his failure to act justly toward his brother and sister-in-law.

The combination stratagem-knowledge-identity-safety appears in the story. Tamar employs a stratagem involving sex and the gifts of nature fertility. The combining of nature's and woman's seasons of fertility is part of Tamar's cleverness. Her knowledge of Judah far surpasses his of her. She can see through his indecisiveness, learn of his plans, guess how he will react to her pregnancy, and envision just exactly what her response must be in order to gain her objectives. She identifies herself as resourceful and fertile; she identifies Judah as potentially able to be productive and at least as compliant with the designs of justice, if not exactly as worthy; and she identifies him as father of her unborn progeny at just the crucial moment.

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[1] However the story seems to indicate that Onan was wrong and Shelah was not.

Judah, on the other hand, seems to refuse to identify Tamar as daughter-in-law by sending her home to her parents.[1] He fails to recognize her on the road, fails to find her when he sends in search of her, and then mistakenly identifies her as a harlot (of whatever exact type). He must re-identify her as someone to whom he has obligations when he identifies her as the mother of his progeny. Tamar's safety is deliberately risked by her so that she can conceive a child for the dead man.

There is an exchange of objects in this story: Tamar receives a kid from Judah, pledged by his signet, cord and staff. Judah's filling Tamar with seed recalls Boaz' gift of seed to Ruth. The threat to fertility comes when Onan refuses to impregnate Tamar, when she is sent away and Shelah is withheld from her, and when she is nearly burned for harlotry.

Each of these stories is compatible with the conclusions suggested by the study of the Iroquois and

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[1] N.b., as Ruth made a journey from mother's house to mother-in-law's house to husband, details indicate that Tamar's progress is from father-in-law's house to father's house back to father-in-law.

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Greco-Roman materials, and each adds insight to the overall question of how motifs articulate the seed symbol. The demonstration of the general similarity between the motifs in the three stories also serves as a basis for investigating further ways in which these three stories which share a language and inhabit a common set of literature help uncover meaning in the book of Ruth.

Motifs Shared by Ruth and the Hebrew Canon

In addition to the insights these two stories afford to Ruth by means of a general analysis of them, a more detailed examination of their motifs offers to uncover yet further avenues to the meaning available from the story of Ruth. To begin such an examination, two of the most distinctive motifs[1] shared by the stories of Rebekah, Tamar and Ruth have been chosen for further analysis. The vocabulary which articulates these motifs--clothing of the woman and man and exchange of object between the man and woman--and their manner of expression will lead to other motifs similar to these elsewhere in the canon of Biblical Hebrew literature. The investigation will give the most

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[1] Some of the motifs are rather common and would not be particularly illuminating for that reason. The two most distinctive motifs provide the most direct access to the other texts that will help illumine Ruth--once such texts have been tested to ascertain that they share a sufficient number of the fertility motifs that have been the focus of the study so far.

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pertinent data responding to three questions: 1) What further interpretation--aligned with what has already been suggested, but also more specific--does a comparative study of these two motif sets within the canon suggest for their occurrence in Ruth? 2) Where else in the Old Testament do these motifs tend to cluster? 3) To what other texts--and to the richness of their meaning patterns and associations--do the motifs show Ruth may be linked? In what kinds of concerns and contexts are these motifs embedded?

The assumptions underlying this phase of the work are that the motifs have not only a general meaning which they share with the basic symbol they are helping to make visible, but that each motif which is used and reused within a particular set of literature acquires, in addition, meaning from every context in which it is used. There is, then, a certain fulness of meaning able to be mediated by gathering the contribution from a motif in its various contexts.[1] Another key assumption on which this investigation is based is that narratives which share a significant number of motifs with the story of Ruth are closely related to it even

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[1] It is not possible to be complete. I have chosen to describe here the contexts that seem to be composed of the greatest number of the motifs with which we are concerned and which seem to offer the greatest insight into the story of Ruth.

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if the fertility-infertility pattern among humans and in nature is not visible. [1] The meaning of such materials must be sought as part of the project of investigating meaning in the story of Ruth--with one set of materials illuminating the other.

The following response is offered to the three basic questions posed for this section, with substantiating data to follow: 1) The two motifs chosen to launch this aspect of the search for meaning each indicate a double, though related focus. The clothing motif expresses a deep--frequently sexual--relationship between a man and woman and the breach of such a relationship; it also expresses a pattern of exile and return, of rejection and protection. The exchange of gifts is likewise employed to discuss the foreign woman--exiled and then redeemed--who herself becomes a bearer of life; it expresses the cycle of exile and return also. Both aspects of the two motifs are rooted in a common symbol of re-seeding the land (field), the release of new life from what seemed to be dead.

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[1] This section involves a different procedure than seeking comparative material based on specific criteria, such as those listed on pp. of this dissertation. The motifs seem to be able to indicate the presence of a similar or related underlying symbol of a narrative even if it is not apparent at the surface of the text. The point is no longer to uncover material whose fertility concerns are more obvious at the level of plot details but texts whose sub-surface or mythic communication is related to seed-field symbolism, as indicated by clusters of motifs.

2) The main places where these motifs tend to cluster are in stories relating to the patriarch's journey into exile (Gen. 12, 20, 26, 27 ff., 37 ff.) and to the events of the deliverance from Egypt and the entry into the new land (Ex. 11-12, 15-17, Jos. 2-9), in legal texts relating to the land (Dt. 10, 21, 24; Lev. 2, 6, 19, 23), and in the narratives of foreign women--rejected and redeemed, sinful and repentant, divorced and betrothed (Gen. 16, 19, 21, 29, Hos. 1-2, Ezek. 16, 23).

3) The texts belong to two major clusters: descent to slavery or oppression and liberation, and the role of the foreign woman as a bringer of life to her people. The common concern is exile and return, oppression and freedom, death and life.

Further comments will be offered on these three general conclusions in the discussion of the material. The insights available specifically for the story of Ruth will conclude this chapter.

Motifs of Clothing

In each of the three stories (Gen. 24, 38 and Ruth) there are four clothing-related motifs which can be interpreted in reference to other similar motifs.

The first reference in the story of Ruth is at 3:3, where Noami bids Ruth to "'wash (וְרָחַצְתְּ) anoint yourself (וָסַכְתְּ) and put on your cloak (וְשַׂמְתְּ שִׂמְלֹתֵךְ עָלַיִךְ...!" Almost the same sequence is found in 2 Sam. 12:20, describing David's actions after the death of his and

Bathsheba's first child: "he washed (רחץ) and anointed himself (סוך) and changed his clothes (שמלה)."[1] In Ezekiel 16 the prophet describes the stages in the life of the woman Jerusalem: in vv. 8 ff. the prophet, speaking the experience of the Lord, finds her in the desert and sees that she is ready for love. He washes her (רחץ), anoints her (סוך) and clothes her (לבש), all preparatory to betrothing her.[2] The cloak (שמלה) is the garment in which the unleavened dough is carried by those departing from Egypt (Ex. 12:34): it is rent as a sign of mourning or distress (Gen. 37:34, 44:13; Jos. 7:6), changed in preparation for a new relationship (Gen. 35:2, Ex. 19:10, 14). Food and clothing (שמלה) are to be given to sojourners just as Israel herself was a sojourner (Dt. 10:18-19).

In Ruth 3:4-7, there is reference to Ruth's action of uncovering (גלה) Boaz' legs (מַרְגְּלֹתָיו). The verb (גלה) to uncover is frequently used in connection with nakedness:[1] Is. 47:1 ff. describes the virgin daughter of Babylon who sits on the ground, grinds meal with millstones, puts off (גלה) her veil, strips off her robe, uncovers her legs (שׁוק) and crosses over rivers, going out of the land of Israel. The word for legs (מַרְגְּלוֹת) occurs only in Daniel 10:6, but it is related to the word for foot (רֶגֶל) which is used frequently for both male and female genitals.[2] The same passage in Ezek. 16 which elaborates other aspects of the life of the woman Jerusalem and her relationship with the Lord speaks of her as parting her legs (רַגְלַיִה) for any passerby, thus multiplying her harlotry.

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[1] P. Ackroyd, *The Second Book of Samuel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 114, comments that David exhibits signs of return to normal after a period of fasting. H. W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary*, trans. J. S. Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), pp. 315-316, agrees, adding that the reversal of the usual order of death and mourning suggests that David sought to ward off death by self-abasement or that he had already anticipated death and mourning as a penitent.

[2] J. W. Wevers, *Ezekiel* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd., 1969), p. 121, and W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, trans. C. Quin (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), p. 206, agree that this is bridal imagery.

The particular combination of spreading (פרשׂ) a garment (כָּנָף) or wings (כְּנָפִים) occurs in the context of protection: Dt. 32:11 describes the scene where the Lord finds his portion Israel in a desert place and hovers over his charges and under them, spreading (פרשׂ) his wings (כְּנָפָיו) to bear his fledgling young along. The combination also occurs in a context that is clearly sexual: Ezek. 16:8 tells of the Lord finding Jerusalem at the age for love, spreading (פרש) his garment (כנף) over her nakedness and plighting his troth with her. The combination of uncover (גלה) and garment (כנף) occurs in legal texts as well (Dt. 23:1/22:30, 27:20),[1] where a son is prohibited from uncovering his father's skirt--presumably the edge of the garment the husband has extended over his wife in marriage.

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[1] Ruth 4:7 also refers to the uncovering of some man's feet--either those of Boaz or the unnamed redeemer, as has been commented upon earlier. The verse may serve as a sort of doubling of the reference in 3:4,7. Carmichael explores extra-biblical references in order to suggest a marriage or sex-related image behind the custom described here in a legal setting.

[2] Campbell, Ruth, p. 121, discusses the various passages.

The last of the clothing references in Ruth is to her shawl (מטפחת) into which Boaz pours barley (3:15). In Is. 3:22 the word occurs in a description of the daughters of Zion whose finery and adornments will be replaced with the garb of exile and disgrace. The shawl is both an image of fine clothing and an image of freedom from oppression.

The clothing motifs in the story of Rebekah are equally interesting. Rebekah receives from Abraham's servant first a gold ring (נזם זהב) (Gen. 24:22). Gold rings are also part of the adornment of the haughty daughters of Zion in Is. 3:21 and of the woman Jerusalem in Ezek. 16:12, who receives a ring as part of her betrothal ceremony. The bride of Hosea (2:15/13) decks herself with a ring when she abandons her husband and pursues her lovers.

Rebekah also receives bracelets (צמידים) for her hands (Gen. 24:22, 30, 47) as does the woman of Ezek. 16:11 as part of her betrothal. In Ezek. 23:42 bracelets are the adornment of adulterous women, given them by drunkards who come in from the desert. Gold rings and bracelets are the adornment of women: bride to harlot, faithful to faithless. For a woman to be given such an ornament by a man is indicative of a serious and probably physical relationship between them.

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[1] When a dual numbering occurs for a scripture citation, the number above the bar is the number that appears in the Hebrew edition and the number below the bar is the number that appears in the English edition: The New Oxford Annotated Bible, revised standard version, ed. H. G. May and B. M. Metzger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Rebekah and her family are also given jewelry (כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וּכְלֵי־זָהָב) and raiment (בְּגָדִים) (Gen. 24:53), the general words for such items being used. The reference to the departure of Rebekah for the land of Canaan, adorned with gold, recalls the departure of the Hebrews from Egypt with jewelry of gold and silver (כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וּכְלֵי־זָהָב) and with cloaks (שְׂמָלֹת) (Ex. 3:22; 11:2; 12;35).[1]

Finally when Rebekah has journeyed to the land of her husband-to-be and when she sees him walking toward her, she takes her veil (צָעִיף) and covers herself (וַתִּתְכָּס) (Gen. 24:65). The only other place where this particular word for veil appears is in Gen. 38, so it will be discussed there. The word for cover occurs in a sexual context in Ezek. 16:8, where the husband spreads his garment over the woman and covers (כסה) her nakedness, canceling their marriage relationship.[1]

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[1] D. Daube, The Exodus Pattern in the Bible (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), pp. 55 ff.

There are four examples of the clothing motif in the story of Tamar, the associations of which lead to similar references. In Gen. 38:14 Tamar puts off (וַתָּסַר) her widow's garments (בִּגְדֵי אַלְמְנוּתָהּ). The use of put off or remove (סור) for clothing is quite common, the most suitable association for the present reference being perhaps in Dt. 21:13, where the captive women remove (סור) their captive's garb (שִׂמְלָה) and bewail their mothers and fathers for a month, after which their captors may marry them. No example is sexual in itself. In most cases a change of garments indicates a change of inner condition.

Having removed her widow's garb Tamar covers herself (וַתְּכַס) with a veil (בַּצָּעִיף) as part of her preparations prior to going to intercept Judah on his journey. The same combination of words is used of Rebekah as she and the man to whom she is betrothed approach each other. The veiling of the woman precedes sexual intercourse. Though Tamar's clothing serves to disguise her identity, that is not its main function as will be seen even more clearly in the next reference. The veil seems--from these two contexts in which it appears--to mark the woman as available for a physical relationship, whether as a wife or a harlot. The narrative of 38:15 confirms that interpretation to some extent by telling us that Judah thought Tamar was a harlot because she had covered (כסה) her face.

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[1] J. L Mays, Hosea: A Commentary (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 38-40, notes that the clothing of the wife was the husband's duty, and that the woman stripped is an image of an abandoned wife. H. W. Wolff, Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea, trans. G. Stansell, ed. P. D. Hanson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 34, notes that the husband's stripping the wife of clothing is his repudiation of his obligations to clothe her. Some commentators would suggest that the verb cover (כסה) used with the cherubim (as in Ex. 25:20, 37:9) combines both sides of the (כנף/יט) (wing/garment) image: protection and marriage.

In the same verse (13) she also wraps herself up (וַתִּתְעַלָּף), either a separate action or a sort of balanced description of her action of veiling herself. The verb occurs with the connotation of covering only here. Elsewhere it is used to describe mourning or fainting action.[1]

The last clothing reference of the story hardly deserves the name, and yet it makes a contribution at the motif level of the story. At the birth of Tamar's twins, the first hand to appear is bound with a scarlet thread (שָׁנִי) (Gen. 38:28), an element which recalls the use of the same signal by which Rahab the Canaanite saves her people (Jos. 2:18, 21).[2]

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[1] Nagler, *Spontaneity*, pp. 44 ff., suggests that the notion of mourning is part of the *Gestalt* of the veil and gives several examples of the use of the veil to express grief as well as to indicate a sexual state, such as chastity. Here the two notions are connected, though illogically.

[2] J. A. Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary* trans. R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 42, comments on the improbability of the literal accuracy of all details in the account of the scarlet thread. It is one of the many places where the value of the presence of a motif may outweigh the sense of it at the rational level. Such a place in a text is an invitation to go below the apparent illogicality to find a deeper layer of meaning.

A few observations, more specific than those which introduced this part of the investigation, can be offered in view of this discussion of the clothing motif. One primary image suggested by the various uses of clothing is sexual. The washing, anointing and dressing of the woman are the preparations of a bride; for a man to cover a woman with his garment is a more figurative expression for a marriage relationship. The woman who uncovers the lower part of a man's body while asking him to spread his garment over her is surely asking for an intimate relationship. The woman's ornaments--jewelry of precious metal and rich garments--connote a similar relationship between him who bestows them (husband or lover) and the woman (bride or harlot). The woman who veils herself is signifying her readiness for a physical relationship. The forceful removal of the woman's clothing marks the end of a serious commitment between them: a rejection of her by her husband, if he is the one to strip her, a rejection of him by her if she is the one to remove the garments provided by him and to make herself available for another.

Closely related to this marriage imagery--and in fact overlapping it--is allusion to exile and return. The woman who is stripped of finery goes into exile not only as a rejected woman but as a rejected people; the woman who rejects her husband's clothing is an outcast. The fledgling protected by the wing is adopted as the heritage of the Lord. The captive removes her garments--exchanges them--to mark the end of her captivity, her relationship to a new lord. Those in mourning remove their garments when their time of sorrow is ended. More specifically, the garment serves to secure the unleavened bread of liberation; the red thread is the mark of the foreign woman by whom the people will receive life.

Motifs of Gifts Exchanged

A similar type of investigation of motifs related to the exchange of objects or gifts between the man and the woman in each of these three stories reinforces the patterns already seen from the clothing motifs. There are quite a few aspects of the motif in Ruth, fewer in the other two narratives.

The first favor Boaz grants Ruth (leaving aside for this discussion whether it was her right already or whether he could add something to it by his permission or approval) is the assurance that she may glean (לקט). The word appears elsewhere in reference to the gathering of manna (Ex. 16; Num. 11:8), in the legislation related to the Israelites' reaping of their own fields in such a way that some produce is left for the poor and for the sojourner (Lev. 19:9)[1] and in Is. 17:5, where reaping is an image of desolation: the land stripped of life.[1]

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[1] The vocabulary of harvest and gleaning in this and subsequent legal passages coincides closely with the vocabulary in the story of Ruth. Of course the technical vocabulary for such tasks is the obvious language to employ, but the variety of tasks described in the narrative that resonate with the legal texts commands notice.

The combination of vocabulary articulating Boaz' gift of water to Ruth: "'and if you are thirsty(וְצָמִת) go to the vessels and drink (וְשָׁתִית) of what the young men have drawn (יִשְׁאֲבוּן)'" (2:9), is very common. The most appropriate references, in view of the passages that are turning up as significant, seem to be Dt. 29:10, in the speech of Moses to the Israelites in the land of Moab, just prior to their going into the land. The speech is addressed to not only the men, women and children of Israel but to the sojourner, the hewer of wood and the drawer (שֹׁאב) of water. A similar reference occurs in Jos. 9, which tells the story of one such group among the Israelites, who become their drawers of water. Exodus 17:1-9 describes the thirst (שֹׁתה) of the people for water while they are in the desert.[2] Isaiah uses thirst (צמא) (and hunger) as an image of distress of exile (5:13) and describes the gifts of bread and water to those fleeing disaster (21:14).

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[1] The explanation of O, Kaiser, Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary trans. R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 79, adds to the force of the image: the Valley of Rephaim is near enough to the city of Jerusalem so that any gleanings left in the valley after the harvest would be gathered immediately by the many landless poor inhabiting the city, leaving the field bare and lifeless, a sign of disaster.

[2] Another instance, as Soggin points out, p. 111, where the surface of the story contains some rifts which invite us to consider the story's significance at a deeper level, is visible here.

A third gift of Boaz to Ruth is described in 2:14: "'Draw near here and eat some food (הלחם) and dip (וטבלת) your morsel (פתך) into the wine sauce (בחמץ)' and he held out(ויצבט) to her some parched grain (קלי). " As was true in the references to Boaz' gift to Ruth of drawn water, so the vocabulary of food is too common to be particularly revealing. The vocabulary does cluster in two places, however. The first reference is to Ex. 12-13, which refers to sour dough (חמץ) and to dipping (טבל) hyssop into the blood of the passover victims in order to spare the Hebrew firstborn. The second reference clusters in Lev. 23, which concerns legislation for the first fruits festival, for the cereal offerings, and directions for reaping the harvest. Leviticus 2 and 6 also contain directives about grain offerings--all of which are set in the context of the exodus and Sinai narratives.

Boaz' concessions to Ruth in 2:15, "'She may also glean between the heaps of fallen grain (העמרים),'" suggest the harvest references in Lev. 23 and Dt. 24. In both sets of legislation the field is not to be stripped bare, but some produce is to be left for the poor. The vocabulary of Boaz' gift to Ruth in 2:16, which was translated above as "'pull some out for her from the heaps'" is attested only here in the Old Testament.

The most interesting gift received by Ruth is grain. The activities she is permitted to do in the field result in her going home with an ephah of barley (שערים) (2:17); and at the end of the night they spend together Boaz pours into Ruth's shawl six measures of barley (3:15, 17). Hosea 3:2 speaks of barley as the hire of a harlot: a woman is bought for fifteen shekels of silver and lectech of barley. A sixth of an ephah of each homer of barley is set aside for the prince in Ezekiel's legislation for the new temple (46:14). Most frequently barley is used as a type of food, also its most obvious meaning in the story of Ruth.

The narrative of the wooing of Rebekah contains two other references to gifts in addition to those already discussed under the motif of clothing. In both cases the gifts are from the family of the woman to the agent of the bridegroom.

The first of these gifts (Gen. 24:11 ff.) is water (הַמַּיִם) from the well (בְּאֵר/עַיִן) drawn (שָׁאַב) by Rebekah for Abraham's servant and for his camels. The gift of water recalls two other patriarchs' wives who provide water for the thirsty in a strange land: Hagar (Gen. 16) and Rachel (Gen. 29). It also suggests reference to the non-Israelite drawers of water mentioned earlier and to the waters of refreshment that are given in the desert (Ex. 15:22-27; Num. 20:2-13).[1] The rest of the vocabulary that is part of this motif is too general to be very illuminating, though שתה (to drink) recalls stories of a number of other women who offer liquid refreshment: Lot's daughters (Gen. 19:32-35), Hagar (Gen. 21:8-21), Jael (Jud. 4:19; 5:25) and other stories of patriarchs in temporary exile: Jacob (Gen. 30:37-43). The imagery of the woman carrying a burden on the shoulder prior to her departure from the land may contribute to exodus imagery, suggesting the Hebrews who depart from Egypt carrying unleavened dough on their shoulders (Ex. 12:34) and the representatives of the tribes leading the way across the water into the land of Canaan (Jos. 4:5). The allusion to Hagar is intensified since she, like Rebekah, carries water on her shoulder (Gen. 21:14). It is worth recalling that the most satisfactory etymology for Ruth's name has been given earlier in this paper as רוה (satiation, refreshment). Water is part of the nature of the woman, necessary for her if she is to bear. It represents a similar aspect of the land: the well-watered land is that which produces. The desert is the place in which water is provided for the people, to help them in their journey of return to the land.

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[1] G. W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), pp. 47 ff. (hereafter cited as Coats, *Rebellion*), contends that the negative murmuring element associated with the texts in their present form does not completely obscure the fact that the bestowal of gifts such as bread and water once had a more positive context. The narratives need not be seen simply as the recital of goods attained through rebellion and complaint.

The gifts of water to the servant and straw (תבן) and provender (מספוא) for his camels evoke Joseph's arrangements for his brothers' beasts (Gen. 42:27; 43:24) as they go down into Egypt and remind us of the use of straw as an image of oppression and oppression intensified (Ex. 5:7-12).

The objects exchanged (and not exchanged) between Tamar and the men in that narrative are also significant. In 38:9 Onan refuses seed to Tamar, as does Judah himself when he refuses to send Shelah to Tamar. The refusal of seed helps illumine the symbolic and anticipatory nature of Boaz' gift of seed to Ruth.

The same narrative, Gen. 38, describes Judah's pledge to Tamar of a kid from the flock (גְּדִי־עִזִּים מִן־הַצֹּאן), evoking narratives of Jacob: his and Rebekah's cleverness in making sure that he would be the one to receive Isaac's blessing, his exile with his Mesopotamian relatives and his care for Laban's flocks (Gen. 27, 30-31); the kid motif also recalls the exiles of Joseph (Gen. 37 ff.) and Moses (Ex. 2). The same animal is also a symbol of liberation in the story of Moses (Ex. 12:5); it marks the legends of Gideon and Samson, liberators of their people (Jud. 6:19; 13;15). A kid is also the gift of Samson to his wife (Jud. 15:1) and the prescribed sin offering in Num. 7:16 and 28:30.

As a pledge (עֵרָבוֹן) of that gift Judah leaves with Tamar his signet, cord and staff (מַטֶּה). The functions these items have in stressing the identity motif have already been noted. The verb to pledge (ערב) occurs frequently in the story of Joseph; the staff (מַטֶּה) is a significant item in the story of release from Pharoah's bondage.

The motifs involving an exchange of objects confirm the pattern discussed earlier with the clothing motifs and add some insight as well. The references seem to cluster around two major themes which are connected themselves: the liberation of an enslaved or exiled people from a foreign land, and the alien woman who brings life to the people.

There are a number of passages where gifts of sustenance are given to the exile or captive--to the exiled patriarchs, to the Hebrews in the desert, to the alien within the borders of Israel, to the exiles fleeing captivity. The liberation imagery of such allusions is strengthened by reference to events leading to such liberation: the dipping of hyssop into blood, the nourishment carried on the shoulder, the sacrificial kid from the flock.

Overlapping with this exile-return image are the allusions to the woman in the foreign land who is recognized, given gifts, betrothed, made part of a chosen people, brought into the community: she receives food, clothing, jewelry. But the same gifts mark clearly the disgrace of the woman: jewelry adorns the harlot, grain or a kid is the price of her hire. The complex figure of the foreign woman is still ultimately a source of life for the people--most clearly symbolized by the gift of water which she is either source of or receives and which she frequently bestows. Her journey from being exiled to welcomed, from being harlot to bride is the journey of her people.

The two sides of the figure expressed by the two sets of motifs seem to converge in the symbol of the field--or more broadly, in the symbol of the land. The alternation of captivity and return is reflected in the description of the land as stripped, desolate, lifeless, dry--and as affording ample nourishment and refreshment to its people--even to the alien among them. The foreign woman is the desolate land, rejected or betrayed by its inhabitants and its Lord, stripped of them as well. The foreign woman is conversely also able to be the land: redeemed, restored, repeopled, source of life, giver of refreshment. The depth of meaning available to--sustaining and enriching--the story of Ruth, comes from its roots in this particular symbol and in its associations with other narratives which express these patterns of exile and liberation, death and return to life. Prior to drawing the implications that these sets of texts suggest for meaning in Ruth, it is important to be sure that they share more motifs with the story of Ruth than simply the clothing and exchange of gifts. In order to catch the details of both the exodus pattern and the foreign woman pattern, I will look at them separately and save discussion of similarities for the demonstration of how the story of Ruth rises from both of them.

Both the exodus pattern[1] and the foreign or outcast woman pattern follow a similar progression of episodes:

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[1] For convenience the term exodus will be used for the pattern, even though it refers specifically to one of the episodes of release from bondage: the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt.

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being or going out of the land, being recognized by the Lord, being taken into some sort of a special relationship, being unable to live that relationship fully, but then turning to the Lord once more. Though there is some artificiality to singling out certain motifs and maintaining that they constitute a pattern, an effort will be made to show how specific the motifs are[1]--often down to the actual words used to express them--and to show that they actually construct a number of narratives.[2] The presupposition sustaining this section of the investigation is that narratives which share motifs and patterns of motifs are able to share meaning, and that all the contexts in which motifs and patterns of them occur add to the meaning they have in any given context. "In order to come to grips with the full meaning of the studied creation, we have to understand its language fully, with all of its meanings and associations."[3]

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[1] Cohn, p. 112, reminds us that the similarities should be quite specific, although his purposes--which seem to be to show genetic relationships among narratives--are not mine.

[2] Once again my purpose is not to be complete but to suggest a number of narratives where the patterns occur in order to illumine the story of Ruth. Soggin, p. 51, e.g., comments on the unity of content visible in Ex. 12-15 and Jos. 3-5.

[3] Cohn, p. 110.

Pattern of Exodus

In the narratives to which the clothing and gift motifs showed the path there are a number of recitals of events which conform in detail to the exodus pattern.[1] This discussion will focus mainly on the narratives of the three journeys of Abraham and Isaac, Sarah and Rebekah to foreign territories (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:1-22), the exile of Jacob to Haran (Gen. 29 ff.), the narratives that tell of the sojourn in Egypt (Gen. 37 ff.), and the details covering the capture and release of the Ark of the covenant of the Lord (1 Sam. 4:1-6:21).

The first major section of the exodus pattern can be described as going out of one's home, being sent out of it, or being taken out of it. The patriarchs Abraham and Isaac and their wives Sarah and Rebekah are driven out by famine (רָעָב) (Gen. 12:10; 26:1), as are the seventy persons of Jacob's family who go down into Egypt (Gen. 41 ff.). Conversely, it is the opposite famine--inappropriate use of food--that leads to the exile of Jacob (Gen. 27 ff.) and of the man and the woman from the garden (Gen. 3:1 ff.).[2]

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[1] According to Daube, p. 11, the exodus pattern is the most basic one in the whole of the Old Testament, with none remotely comparable to it in importance.

[2] The story of Adam and Eve, their exile from the garden and their life of tilling (עבד) the land until such time as they would return to it, serves as a set of brackets--still open at the far end--to all other Biblical stories of exile and return.

There is no food-related reason for the capture of the Ark, though its destination, the land of the Philistines, evokes the patriarchal journeys of Gen. 20 and 26. Once in the alien land the exiled person or group is ill-treated in some way. Abraham and Isaac are deprived of their wives (Gen. 12:11 ff.; 20:2 ff.; 26:7 ff.). Jacob is tricked in his efforts to marry his beloved (Gen. 30:15 ff.), the male offspring of the Egypt-dwelling Hebrews are threatened (Ex. 1:15 ff.), the news of the capture of the Ark causes premature birth pangs and the death in childbirth of Samuel's daughter-in-law (1 Sam. 4:19-20). Jacob and the Hebrews in Egypt both begin their sojourns abroad as favored guests but then slip into the state of being actual or virtual slaves.[1]

The second part of the pattern commences as the Lord responds to the affliction of his people. He sees (ראה) Jacob's tribulation (עָנְיִי) (Gen. 31:42), hears the cry (צְעָקָה) of the enslaved Hebrews, visits (פקד) them in their affliction (Ex. 3:9; 4:31). He afflicts (נגע) Pharoah's house (Gen. 12:17), discomfits (המם) the Egyptians and the Philistines (Ex. 14:24, 1 Sam. 5:9,11), smites (נכה) the Egyptians (Ex. 3:20; 9:15) and the Philistines (1 Sam. 5:6 ff.). Related to the actions of God which lead to the redemption and liberation of his people is the motif which Daube names to describe the presence of the Ark with the Philistines: it is a terrible guest.[1] Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 12:17; 20:3 ff.), Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 26:10 f.) threaten the well-being of those among whom they dwell. Jacob manages to weaken the strain of animals belonging to Laban (Gen. 30:25 ff.). The presence of the Hebrews brings first plagues (מַגֵּפָה) and then death to the Egyptians (Ex. 9:14); the Ark causes plagues among its captors (1 Sam. 6:4). The hand of the Lord is heavy against the oppressors of his people (Ex. 9:3; 1 Sam. 5:7,9; 6:3).

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[1] Vocabulary from the root עבד (to serve) occurs some thirty times in the material telling of the sojourn in Egypt, according to Daube, p. 23. The words related to ישב (to dwell)--particularly to dwell as a resident alien, occur in the episodes of Jacob, of the people in Egypt, and of the Ark (p. 24).

The liberation of his people follows quickly once the notice of God has been drawn to their oppression. The people go out (הלך): Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 12:19), Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 26:16), Jacob and his household (Gen. 30:25; 31:30). Sent out (שׁלח) are Abraham (Gen. 12:20), Hagar (Gen. 21:14), Jacob (Gen. 30:25; 31:27, 42), the Hebrews,[2] the Ark (1 Sam. 5:10-11, 6:2-3, 6, 8). Redeemed (גאל) are the Hebrews (Ex. 6:6, 15:13).

Five more motifs compose the journey of liberation: hasty departure, the despoliation of the captors by the enslaved, pursuit, gifts in the desert, and instruction.[3]

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[1] Daube, p. 73.

[2] The verb שׁלח (to send, or passive, be sent) occurs some forty times in the story of the liberation from Egypt, counts Daube, pp. 29-35.

[3] Daube, *passim*.

The suddenness and swiftness of the departure is clearest in the narrative of the escape from Egypt: the people leave in the middle of the night, in such a hurry that they must carry on their shoulders their unleavened dough wrapped in cloaks (Ex. 12:34-39). Sudden are the departures of Abraham (Gen. 12:20) and of Jacob, who seizes the opportunity of Laban's absence at sheep-shearing time (Gen. 31:19-20).

The despoliation theme is enigmatic and offers yet another instance where a somewhat illogical surface of a narrative invites us to look more deeply for the significance.[1] The liberated captives do not leave empty: the adverb (*רֵיקָם*) occurs in reference to those freed from Egypt (Ex. 3:20 ff.), to Jacob (Gen. 31:42), and to the Ark

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[1] There is something unusual about the Hebrew slaves either taking jewelry from Egyptian masters (or borrowing, as the Septuagint has it) as we are told in the references to this motif: Ex. 3:21-22; 11:2; 12:35-36. M. Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, trans. J. S. Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 93, who comments that the Egyptians originally thought they would get their belongings back, hardly explains the oddness of the episode. B. S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), pp. 175-177, comes perhaps closer when he suggests the allusion to the spoils of victory. Daube's effort, which runs throughout his book, to tie some of the motifs to the legal texts describing the release of slaves is probably the most likely.

(1 Sam. 6:3).[1] The gifts of departure--or plunder in some cases--include silver (כֶּסֶף) (Gen. 20:16), livestock (צֹאן וּבָקָר) (Gen. 20:14, Gen. 31, Ex. 12:32), jewelry of silver and gold (כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וּכְלֵי־זָהָב) (Ex. 3:21-22, 11:2, 12:35-36), cloaks (שְׂמָלוֹת), golden mice and golden hemorrhoids (1 Sam. 6:4 ff.).

Pursuit by the former captors characterizes the departures of Jacob (Gen. 31:22 ff.) and of the people freed from Egypt (Ex. 14). Isaac's relations with the Philistines, once he has departed from the site of the original episode, are characterized by strife (Gen. 26:17-22), and a similar motif is visible in the relations between the Israelites and the Philistines following the release and return of the Ark.

The inverse of the pursuit theme is the freed captives' own temptation to turn back, to retrace their steps to the land of captivity, thus undoing the redemptive action of the one who freed them.[2] Such a motif is well-expressed by the Hebrews who take gold jewelry--itself a sign of their liberation--and make of it an idol (Ex. 32) and who complain about conditions in the wilderness, about their leader Moses, and ultimately about the Lord who is their true liberator.[1] The desert, site of the peoples' infidelity, is a sort of Janus: it stands between the land of slavery and the land of freedom, offering access to both. And it not only occasions temptation and rebellion, but also generous favor by the Lord to his people. The journeying in the desert is a time when the peoples' need for food (לֶחֶם) and water(מַיִם) is met (Ex. 16:1-35; Num. 11:1-35; 21:4-9; Ex. 15:22-27; 17:1-7; 20:1-13), lest the people give in to the temptation to return to the land of death and captivity in order to satisfy their hunger (Ex. 16:3; Num. 11:5).[2] The wonderful fruit brought back to the people by the spies who reconnoiter the land of Canaan (Num. 13-14; Dt. 1:19 ff.) has a similar suggestive function. The desert is also a place of instruction: the law is the means by which the Lord and his people can become known to one another.

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[1] The phrase also occurs in the legal material relating to the release of a slave (Dt. 15:12-15), who is not to leave empty but with a gift from the master's flock, threshing floor or winepress. Once again, Daube's point is to draw attention to the relationship between narrative and legal texts.

[2] The motif does not appear in any of the narratives except the release from Egypt. The desert portions of that narrative may have been influenced by this particular motif in the foreign woman narratives.

The exodus pattern eventually culminates in--or is joined by--the narratives of the entrance (re-entry) to the land of Canaan: the patriarchs and their wives return from the south; Jacob returns from the east; the Ark of God returns to the Israelites; the Hebrews cross the Jordan into the land in much the same way they had left Egypt, as has been noted above. Though the man and woman return eventually to the earth from which they have come, they do not return to the garden--leaving their departure from it still waiting to be reversed and leaving the beginnings of the Biblical story waiting for an ending.

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[1] Coats, Rebellion, pp. 63, 89, suggests that occasionally the grumbling of the people and their expressed desire to return to Egypt are a repudiation not only of the exodus and the leadership of Moses but of the God who led them forth.

[2] Noth, p. 133, points out the seemingly unrealistic description of the conditions of slavery.

Pattern of Foreign Woman

A pattern rather similar to the exodus pattern, but also worth individual attention so that its unique points are visible, is the motif assemblage of the alien woman who brings life to her people.[1] The narratives most suitable to illustrate this pattern are the two recitals of Hagar's expulsion from Abraham's household (Gen. 16:1-15 and 21:1-21), the narratives about Rachel (Gen. 29 ff.), the story of Tamar (Gen. 38), the story of Hosea's wife Gomer and the Lord's bride Israel (Hos. 1-2), and Ezekiel's description of the woman Jerusalem (16:1-63).[2] In each case there are a number of steps in the pattern: the woman is identified as alien or foreign; she is betrothed and/or in some cases bears children; there is some sort of a breach in the marriage relationship--in some cases infidelity on her part, though not always--so that the life that flows from the bond is diminished and threatened; the woman is addressed or instructed in some way; as a result of those words, the bond between the man and woman is re-established and the woman is once again able to be a source of life to her people in some way.

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[1] According to Mays, p. 55, only the woman can be fully the symbol of Israel's return to the Lord.

[2] The recitals of the Lord finding his people in the desert related in Dt. 32 and Hos. 9 share some of the features of both this and the exodus pattern. Since the referent is masculine, I will not treat it here. For the same reason it does not employ the marriage image which is stressed to advantage in the other narratives.

Each of the narratives specifies the woman as foreign or as somehow outside the group that appears to be favored. Hagar is an Egyptian maidservant (שִׁפְחָה) (Gen. 16:1) or handmaid (אָמָה) (Gen. 21:10) of Sarah, wife of Abraham. Her position is doubly reprehensible, as it were, since she is both foreign and subservient in the household. Rachel is foreign in the same way Rebekah (Gen. 24)is: foreign to Canaan, though a relative of Abraham. Tamar is of Canaanite stock, as far as the narrative is concerned, since she is not a descendant of Abraham. Gomer is not foreign but is a woman of harlotry (Hos. 1:2), surely a negative designation whatever its precise meaning.[2]

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[1] The pattern is not dissimilar from the exodus pattern, which was described as: 1) going out or being outside the land; 2) response of the Lord to his peoples' affliction; 3) liberation--which includes the temptation on the peoples' part to return to captivity--and gifts of sustenance and instruction in the wilderness to strengthen the people to go on to reclaim their land.

[2] Wolff, pp. 13-15, discusses the term אֵשֶׁת־זְנוּנִים (woman of harlotry) and rejecting on the grounds of syntax the possibility that it denotes a soliciting prostitute opts rather for a woman whose virginity has been sacrificed for cultic reasons. The same plural abstract noun is also applied to the children of the woman, possibly because they are hers, but more probably

The lineage of the woman Jerusalem is described as Canaanite, Amorite and Hittite. In addition, she is a foundling, cast out (שׁלךְ) when born, neglected and unloved (Ezek. 16:3-5).

In spite of--or, indeed, because of--her alien aspects, the narratives tell us that each of these women is somehow recognized by a man and enters into some kind of intimate relationship with him. Abraham comes to Hagar and she conceives (Gen. 16:4). Tamar is taken by Judah as a wife for his oldest son, and then for his second son (Gen. 38:6 ff.). The marriage relationship is described somewhat more fully in the narratives of Rachel, Gomer and Jerusalem. In Gen. 29:10 Jacob sees (ראה) Rachel at the watering place, aids her with her task of giving water in a way that recalls the meeting of Rebekah and the servant of Abraham. He arranges to marry her and eventually does so in spite of being given another woman first. Rachel is loved, but Leah is hated.[1] Gomer is taken as a wife by Hosea, at the request of the Lord, in spite of the fact that she is a harlot. In fact, the harlotry makes the marriage all the more poignant and powerful an image. Knowing the unfaithfulness of his poeple, the Lord continues in his commitment to them, continues to offer life to them. But

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according to Wolff because the image is meant to suggest rebellion and apostasy of the whole people, rather than just personal morality.

[2] Leah would be possibly as good an example of this pattern-- with her physical affliction and with the fact that she is less loved by her husband being the lack in the marriage relationship that Rachel's barrenness is.

the children of such a relationship only make more visible the lack of fidelity, as their names attest: Jezreel, Not Pitied, Not My People. The young woman Jerusalem is also betrothed in spite of her beginnings. The Lord passes by, sees her (ראה) in the field, spreads his garment over her, covers her nakedness. He bathes and anoints her and decks her as a bride in linen and silk, bracelets and earrings. The beauty of the bride is itself a result of the favor of the bridegroom. These five women illustrate well the richness of the symbol of the alien woman, specifying the various facets of her role: handmaid or beloved wife, Mesopotamian woman or Israelite harlot, cult prostitute or wild desert bride.

The breach in the relationship between the man and the woman occurs also in various ways. The lack in the marriage of Rachel and Jacob is her barrenness, particularly agonizing in view of the fact that the rival wife is evidently fruitful (Gen. 29:30-31). A variation on the theme of barrenness is also the problem in the story of Tamar. Not only does she not conceive children by her first husband, but he dies (Gen. 38:7). When the second son also dies as a result of his relationship with Tamar (38:8-10) and when we hear that Judah withholds his third son from the woman and are told the reason--lest that son die too--the association of the woman with death is complete. Tamar is not able to be a wife lest instead of bringing life she cause death. She is dismissed from the home of her husband and goes (הלך) to her parents' home (Gen. 38:11). Exile is also the lot of the other three women. After Hagar succeeds in conceiving a child--the purpose in Abraham's coming to her, she looks on Sarah with contempt. Sarah in turn oppresses her (ענה) with the result that Hagar flees to the desert (Gen. 16:4-6); in the second version it is Sarah's indignation at the fact that Abraham's two sons are associating that persuades their father to send (שִׁלח) Hagar out, to go (הלך) into the desert with bread (לֶחֶם) and water (מַיִם) on her shoulder, carrying the child as well (Gen. 21:14).[1] The wife Gomer abandons her husband, plays the harlot, goes after her lovers (הלך אחר) thinking it is they who are the source of her food (לֶחֶם), water (מַיִם), and clothing. She does not know (ידע) that it is her beloved who gives her grain, wine, oil, silver and gold (Hos. 2:7/5-10/8). Her refusal to acknowledge the source of her gifts is her rejection of her marriage with Hosea, Israel's rejection of covenant with the Lord. The woman Jerusalem turns from her beloved in a similar way,[2] using her beauty--her very gift from her husband--the clothing, the jewelry, the oil--and employs them in her harlotries (Ezek. 16:15 ff.). As Gomer's children bear names which symbolize the estrangement between husband and wife, so Jerusalem takes her children, the children of her marriage with the Lord, and employs them, destroys them in her unfaithfulness.

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[1] Daube points out all through his book the way in which exodus terminology and motifs are evident in the stories of Hagar. I could have treated the narratives under that part of the discussion but chose to reserve them for this section because of Hagar's being a foreign woman.

[2] T. M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 74, points out that for all the dissimilarity between Hosea and Ezekiel, one image that links them is the motif of the adulterous woman.

The very affliction of the woman becomes an opportunity for and circumstance of healing in the fourth part of the pattern. The Lord remembers (זכר), and hearkens to (שׁמע) the empty condition of Rachel (Gen. 30:22). The faithless wife Jerusalem is to be remembered (זכר) and forgiven after the Lord's jealousy and rage have had full play (Ezek. 16:60 ff.). Judah meets Tamar on the road, speaks to her--and in fact acts in such a way that her connection with death can no longer be maintained by him. He identifies himself to her and brings her barrenness to an end (Gen. 38:16 ff.). The desert is the place where the Lord (or his messenger) meets the weeping Hagar, heeds (שׁמע) her affliction (עֳנִי) (Gen. 16:11), leads her to a spring of water (בְּאֵר מַיִם) (Gen. 21:19), and instructs her about who she is: the mother of a great nation (Gen. 16:10, 21:18). The Lord's word is that Hagar is to return (שׁוב), and she will bear a son (Gen. 16:9,11). Hosea's response to his wife's infidelities is to repudiate her temporarily,[1] to strip her of her clothing, the clothing by which he established his relationship to her in earlier days, to make of her a wilderness, a parched land (Hos. 2:5/3 ff.). The parched land and the woman are doubly equated, as Hosea allures his beloved back to the wilderness[1] to speak to her heart. The return to the desert suggests at one time the threat of reversal of the exodus, time of the Lord's election of his people, but also the possibility of a new journey into the land. The desert period is the time when the people of the Lord learn who is the source of their bread and water, who it is that makes the path clear before them (Hos. 2:8/6 ff.). He seals the new relationship, the new covenant with gifts of the vine; he offers the woman a new entrance, a door of hope in place of the valley of Achan, shadowed by destruction.[2] The desert time is the time of dependence,[3] the time of the woman's waiting,[4] in which she must learn to recognize the identity of her husband. The desert, where the woman comes to know her beloved, is the place where the new covenant, the new betrothal, takes place.

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[1] According to Mays, pp. 36, 45, Hosea's proceedings are ultimately for reconciliation, not for the punishment of his wife. The land is not forsaken but its people are taken away so that they may be restored, may be returned.

The final stage in the pattern is the proliferation of life which results from the return of the woman. Hagar bears

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[1] The function of the wilderness in Biblical tradition is debated. Is the wilderness the land of death or the place of hope? It is both, in the same sense that the land must lie barren in order to be refreshed, in order to yield again.

[2] Mays, p. 45, and Wolff, p. 43, comment that the new gateway replaces the entrance of Jos. 7:20-26.

[3] Mays, p. 44.

[4] Ibid., p. 58.

(ילד) a son, then takes a wife for him (Gen. 16:15; 21:21); Rachel bears Joseph (Gen. 30:23); Tamar--having made known to everyone the name of the man who came to her and having been acknowledged (נכר) by him bears not one son but two (Gen. 38:25 ff.). Jerusalem will remember (זכר) the covenant she once enjoyed; she will be re-established; and she will know the Lord (Ezek. 16:60-63). The bride of Hosea will answer him as in the days of her youth; she will know her Lord. He will respond by renewing the bonds of fidelity between himself and her, between himself and their children: "'I will have pity on Not Pitied, and I will say to Not My People, "You are my people"; and he shall say, "Thou art my God..."'" (Hos. 2:25/23).

The patterns of exodus and foreign woman converge in thy symbol of the land: redeemed, re-entered, renewed, restored. Such land is fertile and fruitful, source of life for its people. Both the exodus pattern and the journey of the alien woman pattern are necessary for the fulness of the image of the Lord's relationship with his people to be seen.

The Fourth Gospel and the Story of Ruth

A final section is required in order to suggest one of the ways in which meaning in the story of Ruth is enriched by material from the specifically Christian part of Biblical literature. Just as the investigation of Ruth's resonance with motifs from other Hebrew materials was necessarily selective--not every pathway opened by the motifs could be followed--so here the investigation is limited to one set of materials. The Gospel of John, highly symbolic, rich in allusions, offers the narratives which are possibly most able to show forth enriched meaning in the story of Ruth. The focus of this limited inquiry will be generally the same motifs which have been the concern of this study for the last hundred pages or so, arranged in the patterns of exodus and alien but life-bringing woman. This section will proceed from the more general task of indicating the prevalence of exodus material in the fourth gospel to investigating the pattern of foreign/returned woman in terms of six scenes in the gospel in which a woman has a prominent role. A closer look at two of these narratives, the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4) and Mary Magdalen at Jesus' tomb in the garden (Jn. 20), will show the pattern more completely.

The investigation of this New Testament material generates the following points:

1) In order to approach understanding of the figure of Jesus in the fourth gospel one must see him in terms of Moses: part of his role is to confront the authorities in order to bring about a liberation of his oppressed people. The signs he gives in order to demonstrate the presence of God with him, and in fact his own identity with God, are met by stony hearts and resistance.

2) Jesus recapitulates the mediating activities of Moses in the desert: providing food, water, and instruction for his

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wandering people, seeking to bring them safely home from exile. Like their ancestors, the majority of Jesus' people fail to see the reality behind the signs he performs and choose not to be included in the community of the New Covenant.

3) There is a group within the Jews, however, which does come to believe in him, to enter a new covenantal relationship with God through Jesus. John's primary figure for this group is the Beloved Disciple.

4) However, to draw on the fulness of this new relationship, the evangelist also uses the traditional image of the marriage bond, with its dialectical rhythm of constant search and never-satisfied hunger, the ever-renewed initiative of God and the varied response of Israel, leading to ever-deeper union between them.[1] Only a woman can fully represent the New Israel as bride of Christ.

5) The six narratives to be worked with show Jesus as the bridegroom, in search of his beloved.

6) Drawing on the rich heritage of women in the Old Testament who are also sought: Hagar, Rebekah and Rachel met at the pool of water; Hagar, Gomer and Jerusalem, spoken to in the wilderness; Gomer and Jerusalem, called again in spite of their past infidelities, the evangelist composes his scenes. The fulness of the image includes all the aspects of the woman: daughter, bride, wife, mother, harlot, rejected woman, unfaithful woman, returned and converted woman.

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[1] Schneiders, "Resurrection Narrative," p. 355.

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7) The woman, the bride, hears the voice of her beloved, recognizes him, comes to know him. In her bridal relationship to Jesus, she is the locus where others can see Jesus and come to believe in him. Her being bride and disciple is her gift of life to her people.

A number of the elements that compose the pattern of exodus in the Hebrew scripture (departure from the land or some kind of oppression, the awareness of the Lord becoming focused on that situation, liberation from oppression--but with the risk or temptation to return to slavery still needing to be confronted) are present in the fourth gospel, and the specific articulation of these elements makes their dependence on exodus material for meaning quite evident. A few of the most inclusive patterns will serve to lay the groundwork for making more specific observations.

Most obvious, perhaps, is the similarity between Moses and Jesus. What was formerly given through Moses (law, bread, water, knowledge of God, signs to authenticate the presence of God) is given more fully through Jesus. Roles once filled by Moses (shepherd, intercessor) are taken up more fully by Jesus.[1] There are other general similarities between the two: each functions as an unrecognized deliverer, each performs a series of signs--which first prompts belief, but which also generates disbelief.[1] It is possible to see some relationship between both the signs performed by Moses prior to the release from Egypt and those he worked in the wilderness[2] and the signs performed by Jesus prior to his glorification.[3] The most pertinent examples for the present purposes (and possibly the most cogent parallels) are the first plague: the changing of water into blood (Ex. 7:17-25), and the first sign: the changing of water into wine (Jn. 2:1-11), and the last plague: the death of the firstborn as the occasion for the liberation of the people (Ex. 11 ff.), and the final sign in the gospel, which leads to the glorification of Jesus: the death and raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11:1-57). The gifts of bread in the wilderness (Ex. 16:1-35; Num. 11:1-35; 21:4-9; Jn. 6) and the gifts of water (Ex. 15:22-27; 17:1-7; Num. 20:1-13; Jn. 4; 7:37-39), both set in contexts of murmuring and disbelief, serve as signs to strengthen the peoples' faith; but in the case of both the Israelites and the Jews, these signs are largely ineffective, and often have the opposite effect. The narrative of the trial of Jesus is thrown into relief by the

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[1] W. A. Meeks, The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), pp. 287 ff.

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[1] J. J. Enz, "The Book of Exodus as a Literary Type for the Gospel of John," Journal of Biblical Literature 76 (1957): 209-211.

[2] See, e.g., B. P. W. S. Hunt, Some Johannine Problems (London: Skeffington, 1958), pp. 55 ff.

[3] See, e.g., the pattern of correlations suggested by by R. H. Smith, "Exodus Typology in the Fourth Gospel," Journal of Biblical Literature 81 (1962): 334 ff.

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context of the Jewish Passover.[1] The important similarities between the two sets of materials extend to the vocabulary of each: both sets speak of belief in God and in his servant, of hardness of heart, of the arm of the Lord.[2] Both literatures use the term "I am" to unfold the self-revelation of God.[3]

The motifs which combine to form the pattern of the salvific woman are also visible in the sections of the gospel in which women are singled out: the marriage at Cana (Jn. 2:1-11), the woman at the well (Jn. 4), the death and raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11:1-57), the anointing of Jesus prior to his death (Jn. 12:1-8), the scene at the foot of the cross (Jn. 19:25-26) and the resurrection narrative (Jn. 20). Each of these women is foreign or alien in some sense, and yet each of them plays an important role in the drama of salvation, for each is a capable announcer of the gospel, either in her deeds or in her words, or in both.[4] Each is able--without being a member of the company of men who accompany Jesus in his historical ministry--to be a disciple in the Johannine sense of the word: one who follows Jesus and who is able to bring others into communion with him and with the life that is his gift to those who believe. The six narratives will be

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[1] J. J. O'Rourke, "John's Fulfillment Texts," Sciences Ecclesiastiques 19 (1967): 437-443.

[2] Enz, pp. 208-209.

[3] Smith, p. 333.

[4] Schneiders, "Resurrection Narrative," p. 384.

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examined to show the influence of the two Old Testament patterns upon them, and to show how they in turn enrich the patterns.

The Four Minor Narratives

The first narrative, the marriage feast at Cana, (2:1-11) is the site of the inauguration of the ministry of Jesus marked by signs. The setting itself--a marriage--is a rich figure in Old Testament usage, as we have seen, for it suggests the espousals of the Lord and his people. Though on the narrative level Jesus is a guest at the wedding, a fuller and deeper reading of John's gospel leaves little doubt that Jesus is the bridegroom and the New Israel is his bride. At this particular wedding the wine has run out. The mother of Jesus, unnamed here as elsewhere in the fourth gospel,[1] intercedes on behalf of the people who are in need. The words of the woman here begin a pattern that will be followed in the other scenes where she speaks: her statement is gentle and obvious on one level, but it has a depth available to us from the perspective of the whole gospel. Her words to Jesus are discreet and yet powerful, a simple reminder to us that the old dispensation is ended and a new one is at hand and that the people are in need of new refreshment. To the

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[1] The fact that Jesus' mother is unnamed--in spite of the fact that she obviously had a name which was known to the writer of the gospel--is a further invitation to look at her in more symbolic than personal or historical terms.

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depth of her words rather than to merely their immediate sense Jesus responds. He addresses her as "'Woman,'" a title that is completely respectful but which once again calls our attention to her generic role rather than to her familial relationship with Jesus.[1] Her words to the servants echo those of Pharaoh regarding the actions of Joseph: "'Do whatever he tells you'" (Gen. 41:55),[2] as the stone containers of water recall those which stood full of water in the narrative of the first of Moses' signs for the freeing of the Hebrews (Ex. 7:19). The stone jars of water, at hand for ritual purifications, also underline the inadequacy of such cleansings truly to sanctify and focus our attention on Jesus, who will refill them with something more powerful.[3] Jesus offers wine in place of water, his gift of the vine evoking the image of Hosea's gift to his beloved (Hos. 2:17/15). The result of the gift of wine is that the disciples believe in Jesus: the intercession by the woman is the occasion for Jesus to act in such a way that life is given, since in the fourth gospel belief in and knowledge of Jesus is eternal life. The unnamed woman obviously knows her beloved, else she would not speak with such confidence, and her knowledge invites

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[1] R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: Introduction Translation, and Notes*, 2 vols. (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1966) I: 107 (hereafter cited as Brown, *John*), states that Jesus does not act because the woman is his biological mother, but because she serves the purposes of God.

[2] Ibid., p. 100. [3] Ibid., p. 104.

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others to believe also.

The death of Lazarus (11:1-57) sets a scene that is similar to the one just examined and is an important one to prepare us for the role of Mary in the garden. The pattern of the woman mediating life is articulated more boldly here. The two sisters' gentle but urgent notification of Jesus that their brother is ill recalls the words of Jesus' mother. They are obvious on one level and more profound on another since they call on Jesus as giver of life to his people. As Jesus said to his mother so does he say here to these two women that his works have their own hour and purposes.[1] But here as before, Jesus' actions belie his words to some extent,[2] for he journeys to the place where the women live. Martha comes forth to meet him and intercedes for the life of her brother. Jesus speaks to her in her grief, seeking to replace her beliefs in life after death with himself. Mary's role in the pericope is interesting--adding little or nothing to what Martha has said and done but serving to draw attention to itself for that very reason. Once again the stage for the woman's role in the resurrection scene is being prepared.[3] Jesus responds to the intercession of these two weeping women, goes to the place where Lazarus lies and calls him forth to live again. The scene suggests to us not only the bridegroom speaking of himself to the heart of his bride (Hos.2) but also the Lord or his messenger who meets the weeping Hagar and promises her life for her son in place of the death she had envisioned (Gen. 21); it recalls the enslaved Hebrews for whom the sign of death is the moment of their liberation (Ex. 11 ff.). Once again the goal of the story is not so much the resuscitation of Lazarus as it is an increase of belief in those who see the sign. Jesus' words thanking his father for this last and greatest of his signs prior to his own glorification, so that the people may know, is balanced by the narrator's note that many did believe--so many, in fact, that the authorities put in motion the plans that will culminate in Jesus' death and resurrection. The women intercede with Jesus for the life of one whom he loves,[1] and not only does that person benefit but others as well. The women have a role in the death and resurrection of Jesus, which is to be the ultimate experience of belief for those who can enter into it and understand.

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[1] Brown, John, I: 431.

[2] The dialogue with the disciples (vv. 7-16) serves the purpose of underlining the inability of the disciples to understand what Jesus is about until they have seen the sign. The obtuseness may also highlight the belief which the two women have in Jesus, though it is not yet complete, either.

[3] Schneiders, "Resurrection Narrative," p. 404.

The anointing of Jesus by this same Mary of Bethany (12:1-8), sister of Lazarus, is carefully tied not only to the episode of the raising of Lazarus (11:2), but is most

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[1] The anonymous designation of Lazarus suggests once again that Lazarus represents more than his personal, physical presence. The one whom Jesus loves is his people, the New Israel.

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understandable when its relationship to Jn. 20 is seen.[1] In this scene Mary's focus is on the body of Jesus: she anoints it with nard--a gesture interpreted by Jesus' words as being related to his death and burial. Mary performs that action now, since it will not be possible--or appropriate--for her to do so after his death. The anointing is a sign of marriage as well as of death, though, and in this passage the bridal overtones are visible, if muted until the final scene. The bridegroom who anoints Jerusalem (Ezek. 16), the oil that is Hosea's gift to Gomer--the Lord's to his beloved--marks the recognition by the woman that Jesus is the bridegroom. The Passover setting of the narrative recalls the anointing that is a sign of life to the messenger of death (Ex. 12:22 ff.). The value of the nard and the lavish amount of it for Jesus' feet add intensity to the woman's action. Brown indicates that for a woman to loose her hair in public--which Mary must have done in order to wipe Jesus' feet--

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[1] The question of how many Marys there are even in this gospel, let alone in all the gospels and in Christian tradition, is well beyond the scope of this paper. The emphasis in this analysis is on the role of the woman in general, so that it is not vital to unravel the historical details behind each figure. There are skeins of details tying these six narratives together, so that one fulfills and enriches the others--whether the women in them are the same or not. For a fuller discussion of the problem of the Marys, but with similar attention to the symbolic aspect rather than just to the historical, see Schneiders, "Resurrection Narrative," pp. 397 ff.

would have been a scandalous action.[1] He also states by way of general summary that Mary's action of anointing Jesus' body is unconsciously prophetic as is the comment made by the Jewish leaders in 11:50. Each action in its own way serves to bring actuality to the glorification of Jesus.[2]

The fourth episode featuring a woman occurs in 19:25-26, and once again involves the Mother of Jesus. As she was near him at the outset of his ministry (and has not been reported to have been since then) so she stands by him at the moment of his glorification. Here she does not speak; Jesus' address to her, "'Woman,'" recalls the role she had at the inauguration nuptials of the New Israel. Here her role is to be midwife, so to speak, at the birth of the new community from the side of Jesus. She continues the woman's role of life bearer by receiving as her son the Beloved Disciple, the Johannine symbol of the believing community. The physical, historical presence of Jesus is replaced--through the action of the mother--by the first (and only) generation of his disciples. It is through his disciples--and through the Beloved Disciple in particular for John's community--that incorporation with Jesus and his father and their Spirit will take place. The image

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[1] Brown, John, I: 450, summarizes with approval the work of P. Benoit which is trying to sort out the various related narratives in the gospels. The detail is useful for the nuanced picture of the woman that the scripture draws.

[2] Ibid., p. 454.

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of the woman who is given a son through whom life comes informs this scene: Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Rachel, Tamar, Ruth all contribute.

The Two Major Narratives

The two narratives where the woman's role is most visible--most sensitively and fully drawn--are the narratives of Jn. 4 and 20. These scenes, richly informed as they are from the Old Testament, give fulness to the shorter, more limited scenes commented upon above.

The events of chapter 4 begin with reference to a journey that Jesus must make in response to his or his disciples' baptizing. The reference serves to line the events of chapter 4 with the testimony given by John the Baptist to those who question him about Jesus' baptizing. John the Baptist's response identifies Jesus as bridegroom--imagery he is to share with the Samaritan woman in chapter 4.[1] Jesus' journey from Judea to Galilee occasions[2] his passage through Samaria--a place foreign to the Jews of Jesus' day. The journey breaks at Jacob's Well, located near the field given to Joseph by Jacob. The disciples go off to buy food--a detail important both to the plot and to the symbolism.

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[1] Ibid., p. 171.

[2] A journey from Judea to Galilee does not necessitate passage through Samaria, however, according to Brown, *John*, I: 169.

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The woman comes to the well at the sixth hour[1] and finds Jesus seated there. The scene is quite similar to that of Gen. 24, when the marriage agent comes to the town of Rebekah and stops by the well. Jesus asks her for water--as the servant asked Rebekah, signifying her as bride. The Samaritan woman's question to Jesus serves to focus upon her identity as foreign and also stresses her inability to perceive the richness of what Jesus has said. Jesus' next words equate him as the gift of God, water in the wilderness (Ex. 15:22-27; 17:1-7; Num. 20:1-13), and invite her to turn to him for God's gift. Once again she does not understand him because her attention is limited to physical realities. Jesus' next words to her (vv. 16-19)--a change of subject only on the superficial level of the story--are a reference to the many lovers she has gone after before, and they continue to dwell on the marriage relationship he is offering her. His offer to replace the water of the old covenant with living water of the new covenant is reinforced by his words to her which are to lead to her recognizing the voice of her bridegroom, reinforced to us by the sign we have seen at Cana. The Samaritan woman is the fullest embodiment of the figures of the woman in the Old Testament: she is the virgin Rebekah who is asked for water; she is the beloved Rachel whose bridegroom provides her with water; she is Hagar and Israel in the desert, given water; she is Jerusalem, bride of the field, faithless but eventually remembering; she is Gomer, wife of Hosea and Israel, wife of the Lord: harlot, wife, mother, faithless woman taken to the desert and betrothed anew.[1] What she learns from Jesus is the identity of himself, the identity of the Father, and the identity of the true worshipping community. Her response to what she learns is joyful acceptance, total conversion.[2] Jesus' address to her, "'Woman,'" once again alerts us to the fact that it is her generic identity that is most important. His address to her prefaces the words that what she has been looking for is here now: "'I am he.'" She leaves her own water jar, useless in the new dispensation,[3] returns to her own people, and summons them to Jesus, drawing them with reference to the words he spoke to her, his knowledge of her. The Samaritans come to Jesus at her urging but believe because of their own experience with Jesus. The time during which she is evangelizing is filled by John with Jesus' exchange with his disciples, who have returned and who do not understand why he is speaking with a woman. They, unlike the woman, do not perceive the bridegroom role that Jesus is manifesting here. They are not able to rise above the physical reality of the food they have just obtained to understand that Jesus has access to other food. Once again it is a woman who is able to grasp the identity of Jesus and to be thereby a source of life to her people, for she is able to bring them to the life that Jesus offers. She, as the bride of the new nuptials, is the symbol in which they are able to meet God.

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[1] Time references are given in all six of these narratives. This reference to the sixth hour equates the woman's response with that of Jesus' mother in 19:25-26.

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[1] Schneiders, "Resurrection Narrative," pp. 361 ff., maintains that the primary model for the relationship of bridegroom and bride in the fourth gospel is the Canticle of Canticles.

[2] Schneiders, "Resurrection Narrative," p. 361.

[3] Brown, John, I: 173.

The last of the narratives which features the woman--the culmination of John's theology of the woman's role in salvation, for which the other five narratives prepare and to which they contribute--is the resurrection account in Jn. 20. The scene is the richest of the encounters between the bridegroom and the bride; it is the drawing of the woman--and those to whom she is sent--into the new covenantal relationship between the Lord and his community. The scene opens with the journey of Mary Magdalen[1] to the tomb while it is still dark. The stone has been removed--once again evoking for us the meeting of Jacob and Rachel, and reinforcing the marriage imagery which pervades this scene.[2]

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[1] Mary Magdalen is a new figure in this gospel--again suggesting that her historical importance is not the most important factor to the narrator of this scene. Mary Magdalen is all the women who have been seen already.

[2] There is much creation imagery here, too, which must go without comment due to the limits of this study.

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Mary recognizes the sign as important, and rushes off to tell the others of it, though she does not yet understand it herself. Her expectations and hence the boundaries of her ability to perceive are still limited to the physical. Her going to the others results in the journey of the Beloved Disciple to the tomb. The sign by which he is initiated into belief is his seeing the facecloth which had wrapped the head of Jesus. (Once again, those who believe do not do so because of the woman's belief in itself, though she is instrumental in their belief.) The cloth is the equivalent of the veil Moses wore after he had spoken with God and returned to the people, to protect them from the brightness of his countenance. Jesus has laid aside that veil permanently, now that he is with the Father.[1] Mary remains at the tomb after the Beloved Disciple and Peter have left; and her tears as well as her words to Jesus, whom she mistakes for the gardener, testify to her as yet unsuccessful search for her beloved. Her second invitation to belief is the vision she sees when she looks into the tomb; two angels sit at the head and the foot of the place where the former presence had been (Ex. 25:22 ff.).[2] Once again, since the conscious object of her search is the corpse of Jesus, she does not understand the symbol, nor is she able to enter the transcendent through it. It is only the voice of bridegroom, his address to her as "'Woman'"--and ultimately his calling her by name, to which she responds.[1] Her response is to greet him by a title. S. M. Schneiders says of this exchange: "It is a formula of mutual self-giving and mutual possession that brings to a culmination the most intimate OT expressions of the covenant (e.g. Dt. 27:17-18; Hos. 2:23 21 ; Is. 54:5-8; Ezek. 16:60-63).... Verse 20:16 is the sealing of the New Covenant between Jesus and the New Israel which is the Johannine community.[2] She recognizes him and turns, able to see the risen Lord once she is no longer searching for the dead Jesus. She knows him as spouse of the New Israel and as Lord of the New Covenant. Her participation in this revelation requires that she not remain there speaking to Jesus but that she go and announce to the others that they are included in the new relationship between God and his people.

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[1] Schneiders, "Resurrection Narrative,"pp. 301 ff.

[2] Ibid., pp. 408 ff.

Summary and Re-interpretation of the Story of Ruth

The story of Ruth is most basically a story of re-seeding the field; a story of exile and return, a story of the nuptials of the Lord and his bride.

The rhetorical aspects of the story focus this symbol by calling our attention to the questions of the identity of the woman--as foreign and returned--and to the questions of the identity of the man--redeemer and spouse--and by drawing our attention to the nature of the bonds which unite them. The rhetorical features of the story continually call us to look to nature and to the agricultural sphere to understand the drama of this story.

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[1] Ibid., p. 392.

[2] Ibid., pp. 438-439.

Temporal and spatial aspects of the story help convey meaning by tying the imagery of the seasons of seed and the places of journey and rest to the relationship of the man and the woman. The story can unfold when the correct season has arrived and when the time and space of the journey come to completion.

The plot of the story is concerned primarily to show that Ruth's homecoming is her marriage and that the one who gives her gifts while she is a sojourner and an exile, the one who speaks to her heart while she is still journeying, is both her husband and her redeemer.

The character relationships function to illustrate the various aspects of the woman as exile, as widow, as barren, as mother, as foreigner, as disciple, as daughter, as bride. The particular relationship between Boaz and the Lord, who see the woman's affliction and respond by gifts of bread and water and consolation, who spread a garment of matrimony and wings of protection and who redeem the land of the exile, helps us to understand the depth of this story of new life. The suitability of Boaz and Ruth for each other is one particular facet of the story of the nuptials of the Lord and Israel, of the covenant by which the people becomes the Lord's people.

The motifs which compose the story of Ruth are shared by other narratives whose basic symbols also include seed and field. Such narratives help us to see the vital connection among the alien state of the woman, the journey of the man in search of her, the importance of his identity, and the journey she must make--a journey which pulls her between mother and husband and which draws her from her husband to motherhood, becoming a bearer of life herself. The woman Ruth draws upon and contributes to the figure of Sarah, first barren, then fruitful; of Hagar, given water on her journey, spoken to in her affliction; of Rebekah and Rachel, foreign women who journey to become restorers of life to the posterity of Abraham; of Tamar, who is able to raise an heir for the dead; of Gomer, who comes to know her husband's voice and who returns to his home; of Jerusalem, foreign bride; of the Mother of Jesus, to whom the new community is entrusted; of the Samaritan woman, foreign and yet messenger of salvation; of the sisters of Lazarus, who intercede for the life of their brother and hence for the faith of believers; of Mary of Bethany, whose action prophesies and helps to effect the death and resurrection of Jesus; of Mary Magdalen, who hears and recognizes the voice of her beloved, turns to him and then journeys so that the people chosen by God can be included in the new covenant. Ruth is the cast out, exiled people of God, redeemed and restored to covenant relationship.

The story of Ruth begins with an exile brought about by famine, with the journey of a family into a foreign land for the preservation of seed. The journey results in death as well as life: three of those who journey to Moab for food die there. For them, exile ends in death. For Naomi, it leads to bereavement at the deaths of her husband and sons, at the loss of security they would have provided. For Naomi, exile is grief, widowhood, separation. Her exile has estranged her from her land, from her God, from the possibility of life through her husband's seed. The two daughters-in-law her sons give her are more a burden to her than a source of hope in restoration. The journey the family made in order to save life seems to have destroyed it.

But in the larger pattern, the journey of the three men to the foreign land in search of life has resulted in the choice of a woman from the Fields of Moab who will be the one to journey back to the land of her husband's people in order to be a source of life to them; she, paradoxically, is the one through whom the old stock will be connected with the new scion.

The decision to leave the land which promised much but exacted more, to go back to the land which had seemed to threaten, is made by Naomi not in peace but in angry resignation. What she has heard--that the Lord has remembered his people and given them food--is for her a beginning of reversal, not her actual return. Naomi is the land: ravaged, desolate, dry; she is the spouse cast out by her Lord. She holds little hope for the re-seeding of herself, for her redemption, for any restoration of the line of Elimelek through her womb. The bitterness of her exile, oppression and affliction is visible in her uncomprehending anger at God's dealings with her and in her sense that she has been released from slavery empty--emptier than she entered it. Naomi is the bitterness of the exiled people, deprived not only of their hopes but apparently even of the ability to hope again. She has not yet learned who is the giver of gifts, the restorer of life.

The first part of Ruth's journey in the steps of her mother-in-law is not able to bridge the distance between them or to alleviate the emptiness Naomi experiences. Ruth is the foreigner, choosing to leave her homeland in search of another land. But unlike Abraham who was lured with promises, and unlike Rebekah and Rachel who were spoken for by promising young men, Ruth's journey begins with no assurance that she will find rest--no assurance, that is, except the blessing of Naomi, who prays that Ruth find rest in the home of a husband. On this single thread and on her own determination to join Naomi's people and to come under the protection of her God does Ruth's destiny depend. "No God has called her; no deity has promised her blessing; no human being has come to her aid....[N]ot even Abraham's leap of faith surpasses this decision of Ruth's....There is no more radical decision in all the memories of Israel."[1]

Naomi is determined that her loneliness and lack of security, her dead condition, should be maintained; thus she is unwilling to have a foreign, female companion for her journey home. Her efforts to dissuade Ruth from coming with her make her equivalent to Laban, who would have restrained first his sister and then his daughter from going to a new land, and to Judah, who delayed carrying out his obligations to the dead, doubting the possibility that life could come where death had been so persistent. She is Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalen, whose grief limits her vision to physical realities. But Naomi has interceded for Ruth's needs, and toward the fulfillment of this goal--insofar as their needs coincide--the women journey together.

The time of their arrival is just right; for the renewed blessing of the land, about to be gathered in such abundance, is reaching out to revive their barrenness as well as the land's. Like Jacob and like Tamar, they have timed their journey well. The fortuitous timing continues as Ruth, an alien and sojourner in Israel, an exile in a land potentially hostile to her, continues on her journey in search of rest. She comes to the land of the man who is to be her husband. He recognizes her as one of his people but also recites her identity as an exile, as a bereaved but faithful woman. He speaks to her heart, gives her bread and water, offers her community and protection with his people, begs her not to go to another land. He welcomes her to his land, with its plenty, and to his people. He blesses her, praying that she will find the protection of marriage and redemption with the Lord. She in turn recognizes him and bows to the earth before him. She partakes of his food and profits by his instruction. Then, as do the people whom she has joined and as does the provident land which she symbolizes, she gives from her sufficiency to Naomi, the widow who dwells with her. Boaz has acted toward Ruth as the Lord acts toward his people. Ruth's action toward Naomi, which also embodies the bounty of the Lord, is the moment of Naomi's return. She recognizes the giver behind the gifts, and blesses him--who does not abandon his loving kindness with the living or with the dead. Naomi's exile is ended, her redemption all but sealed, as she recognizes the significance of Ruth's inclusion with Boaz' people. She has been given food and will be redeemed. Naomi's exile and enslavement has not been forever; the land that had been forsaken is once again reclaimed by a redeemer.

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[1] Trible, p. 173.

The events of the threshing floor repeat the same basic movement of the events of the field, with perhaps more emphasis of the marriage aspects of the symbol of return of seed to the field. Naomi's directions to Ruth are for the preparation of a bride, for a woman going to find the one who has spoken to her heart, who has given her gifts.

Her journey to the threshing floor by night and her actions once she is there also draw on harlot imagery, so that Ruth is able to represent that aspect of the woman as well as the more dominant faithful widow and barren wife aspects. Ruth's gesture is a request for marriage, while her words speak of redemption. Boaz recognizes Ruth as his beloved, as the one who did not go after other men; he promises her the protection of marriage which her gesture requested while he leaves the question of redemption more open. Though we know that on the level of symbolism the bridegroom and the redeemer must be the same, we are left to wonder how this unity will be achieved and to ponder how the bridegroom and redeemer can provide new life in the place of that which has been cut off by the exile.

The final scene of the night spent at the thresing floor condenses and unifies all three aspects for us, as Boaz once again gives Ruth a gift of seed. Ruth receives the gift as an exile, carrying it in her shawl as she sets forth on the last phase of her journey home. The seed is also the pledge of marriage, the gift of a man to a woman; and it is additionally a gift of levirate marriage, the gift withheld from Tamar by her husband's kin. Ruth is released, returned, not empty as Naomi felt *she* had been, but with a gift containing within the fulness of life. The seed is the pledge symbolizing the reality of the Lord's gifts to his people, to his bride, to his land.

The last chapter opens at the city gate, the same topos where resolution of Tamar's levirate needs was made. The field of Elimelek is itself an image of return; for it, like the land Jeremiah redeemed before the exile, is a sign that life would return to the land (Jer. 32:6 ff.). What is elliptical and prophetic in Jeremiah is more rational here, but equally laden with meaning. The field is the sign of continuity of the past with the present; the land of Elimelek, temporarily forsaken in exile, is redeemed by the Lord for an heir of Elimelek and Mahlon. The field of Elimelek, cast off for a time as the harlot-bride of the Lord is re-espoused, re-seeded, and re-peopled with the children of the same man and woman. The land and the woman are redeemed, re-entered. The land of the lord does not fall into another's hand. The one who speaks to her heart is to be the woman's redeemer as well--an identity which Ruth has already recognized, not in ignorance of the law, but in true knowledge of her beloved. The return of the two women ~~is~~ realized in the full knowledge and recognition of their home, their rest.

The boy Obed, born to the man and the woman, new inhabitant of the land, is aptly named to describe the journey of his people.[1] He is given the land of his fathers. The genealogy solidifies the relationship between the past and the present, tracing the line from Judah's son Perez to David the King, with no break of exile or barrenness occurring in between them.

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[1] Sasson, Ruth, p. 177, thinks it is not part of Ruth vocabulary.

The significance of the patterns of exile and return, alien woman and bride is clear. What God has done once, we may hope, we may be assured, he will do again.[1] The value of recasting the symbol of re-seeding the field in these two patterns and in this particular story of Ruth leads us back to the questions about interpretation of texts with which we began.

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[1] Daube, pp. 13-14.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Since the preceding chapter concluded with a summary of the material of chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 in the form of a re-interpretation of the story of Ruth, the task remaining is to comment more fully on the introductory and more generally theoretical section of this study in view of the interpretation that has been performed, as it were, from the text. The study began with three general questions 1) about the similarities among classical narratives--similarities of stories, patterns and motifs, 2) about the relationship of form to content and of both form and content to meaning, and 3) about the ways in which texts communicate with us and the way in which we understand them. These three questions can be addressed now with reference both to philosophy of language and to the specific text with which this study has been most concerned.

Most basic to this particular narrative of Ruth is a symbol: the relationship of seed to field and the life which results from the interaction of these two elements. The working definition of a symbol for this study has been that it is a sensible reality which renders present and

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involves a person subjectively in a transforming experience of the mystery of the transcendent.[1] Another definition, compatible with the first but offering additional helpful features, is that of the philosopher P. Ricoeur, who defines a symbol as "any structure of signification, in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first."[2] There is a double meaning: first an immediate, material and physical sense, but also a level which is more opaque by which the symbol means more than its physical component. It is the double meaning which releases meaning.[3] "The surplus of meaning is the residue of the literal interpretation," Ricoeur notes, adding that there are not really two distinct significations but a single movement to the second through the first.[4] A symbol is bound to the cosmos: "Here we touch an irreducible element....In the sacred universe the capacity to speak is founded upon the

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[1] Schneiders, "Resurrection Narrative," p. 13.

[2] P. Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics," in The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work, ed. C. E. Reagan and D. Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 98 (hereafter cited as Ricoeur, "Existence," Ricoeur, Philosophy).

[3] P. Ricoeur, "The Language of Faith," in Philosophy, p. 233 (hereafter cited as Ricoeur, "Language").

[4] P. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning, D. Pellauer, trans. (Fort Worth, Texas: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p. 55 (hereafter cited as Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory).

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capacity of the cosmos to signify. The logic of meaning, therefore, follows from the very structure of the sacred universe."[1] "...[T]he symbol hesitates on the dividing line between bios and logos. It testifies to the primordial rootedness of Discourse in Life."[2] Symbols "plunge their roots" into and derive their stability from life, feeling and the universe.[3]

The seed-field symbol is derived from nature, from agriculture, from human existence and activity. The earth (field, garden, vineyard) is the feminine element and the seed (or the rain or the plow) is the masculine. The fruit produced is the new life, the offspring. "...[T]here is a correspondence between the tillable soil and the feminine organ, between the fecundity of the earth and the maternal womb, between...semen and seeds, burial and the sowing of grain, birth and the return of spring."[4] The seed and the field offer access to the transcendent: to the realities of new life as a result of death; to joy deepened through pain; to the fruitful alternation of rest and productivity, journey and return, frustration and poverty and generativity; to the mutually enriching interaction between male and female; to the relationship between the human and the divine. The

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[1] Ibid., pp. 61-62. [2] Ibid., p. 59.

[3] Ibid., p. 64. He also comments on p. 63 that there is a limit to the ability of what is to be brought to language to pass into language.

[4] Ibid., p. 62.

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linguistic symbol is itself multivalent, containing within itself the many facets of the reality of the renewal of life. The symbolic expression has a semantic charge which is inexhaustible.[1] The seed-field symbol connects the story of Ruth--one particular articulation of the symbol--to all other texts which are expressions of the same symbol. The twenty narratives which were used in order to illumine the story of Ruth are helpful insofar as at least one of their basic symbols is the interaction of seed and field.

Motifs, those elements which contribute to the story primarily at the content and secondarily at the formal level are the particular ways in which the symbol of the story is expressed. They may be visualized as pathways opened up in front of the symbol, generated by the symbol. The motifs are related to the symbol, though a particular motif may be related to more than one symbol. As the symbols are cosmic and not the property of any exclusive time period or culture, so the motifs do not depend for meaning solely on regional use. The twenty stories used for purposes of understanding the story of Ruth share common motifs, each of which helps communicate the seed-field symbol: the timing of human festivals and of crucial events in the lives of human beings are linked to the times of planting and gathering, hence participating in the crises attending those time in the natural, agricultural and human cycles; the stage on which the drama of the human events is played tends to be symbolically significant--for example, the field, the threshing floor, the watered glade, the desert--with the result that the places contribute associations to the events that happen within them; the journey from a mother's home to a husband's home, from the alien place to the home, is given a more cosmic significance by its association with the alternation of life and death, famine and fruitfulness; the motifs which specify the woman as virgin, as daughter, as bride, as harlot, as faithless, as barren, as mother, as alien, as returned all rest in the basic nature of the woman as the one in whom and from whom life grows and to whom all life eventually returns in order to contribute still more fully to fertility; the stratagems by which the man identifies the woman in her various aspects point to the need the man has for the woman in order to make his contribution to fertility.

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[1] Ricoeur, "Language," in Philosophy, p. 233.

The motifs which structure the story of Ruth and which speak the various facets of its basic symbol can be understood better when looked at in relation to their function in other seed-field narratives. There is mutual benefit to all such narratives as their motifs gain depth by being seen as interrelated. The story of Ruth needs to be seen as one among a number of narratives employing the motifs of the journey of a woman: of an alien woman coming to a new land; of an exiled woman returning to her home; of a woman

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struggling to define her nature as daughter, as wife, as mother--both receiving life and enhancing it, both active and passive; of the challenge to identify the male who will release the fruitfulness within her, who may draw her away but who will journey in search of her and welcome her home; of fasting and abstaining; of famine and barrenness; and of sharing once again fully in the basic source of fertility which renews all those who live.

The meaning mediated by these motifs is intensified when in addition to their cosmic meaning they also evoke the resonances of other narratives which can then be seen to contribute meaning. This increase of meaning through regional association[1] is visible in the case of individual motifs where, for example, the journey of Ruth with seed bound in her garment is understood most clearly in terms of the flight of the Israelites from Egypt, or where the introduction of the field of Elimelek to the narrative loses some of its strangeness once we can see it in relation to the land redeemed by Jeremiah as a symbol of the return from exile. Even more significant for the meaning offered by the story of Ruth is the fact that the articulation of its motifs ties it to two main patterns within Biblical Hebrew literature: the patterns which compose the exodus (liberation from bondage and the return to the land) and the foreign woman (the apparent necessity for the return of life to come through a woman who is in some senses alien to the people she is to benefit). The motifs--and the words which express them--function as clues revealing such patterns within texts, patterns which themselves express historical events and experiences of the people Israel. All of the depth of such experiences becomes available to the story of Ruth as it employs motifs and their vocabulary already rich from use within the tradition. There is mutual enrichment; the story of Ruth needs to be understood in terms of the stories of liberation from oppression and in terms of the narratives of the journey of an alien but somehow fertile ancestress, while in turn other stories which employ such patterns benefit by insight available from the use of those patterns in the story of Ruth. The two major patterns are yet another way of speaking about the exile of the people and their return to the land; of the lack of faithfulness and consequent infertility of the people; of the Lord who woos the faithless and barren woman and draws her into a new convenant relationship to him through which her fruitfulness returns once more: the seed returns to the field.

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[1] Ricoeur, "Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics," in Philosophy, p. 147 (hereafter cited as Ricoeur, "Main Problem").

The particular plot of the story of Ruth and the way in which it develops is one of the possible arrangements of the many motifs related to seed and field. While depending heavily on the cosmic roots of the symbol and motifs and on the enriched meaning available to motifs and arrangements of them through an interrelated set of literature, the particular plot of the book of Ruth generates meaning also by its emphasis on the identity both of the exiled woman who returns to her homeland and of the young foreign woman, on the identity of her spouse, on the equivalence of the human words and actions with the divine realities, on the extravagant kindness with which the men and women treat one another and on their eagerness to go beyond the law in their service of one another. Each of these facets of the plot makes it highly suitable to tell anew the story of the Lord and the people whom he loves so deeply, whom he is so eager to draw to his embrace.

On each of these levels of articulation, then, it is possible to see the way in which the basic symbol of seed and field dominates the story of Ruth.

In addition to the clarification of the story's underlying symbol, a second basic aspect of the story of Ruth which must be discerned as part of the interpretation is the question which brought the story into being, a question to which the story is a response.[1] The question and the symbol seem to meet to mutual advantage: the question gives some context to the symbol, and the symbol contributes depth for the question. The story itself becomes a symbol through which a world is made visible. It would appear that the question to which the story of Ruth offers the fullest

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[1] Palmer, p. 200, discussing the thought of Gadamer.

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response is: how is the new life possible with the return of seed to the field? In what ways does that phenomenon signal and symbolize (in the fullest sense of the word) new fruitfulness on all levels of life?

A text such as the story of the exile of Naomi from her homeland and her return to it and of the journey of Ruth the Moabite woman to be included in the people Israel itself becomes a symbol through which an interpreter may be in dialogue with the question of how new life is generated as seed returns to the field. As poetic discourse, the story's ability to communicate is bound up with the notion of words as polysemous--able to mean more than one thing, to offer several senses.[1] Its language does not have a single, fixed meaning but shifts in such a way as to invite speculation.[2] "Language is not only an object in our hands, it is the reservoir of tradition and the medium in and through which we exist and perceive our world."[3] A text, though originally communicating partially through the regional, ostensive meanings intended by the author, comes to be independent of the author in some senses once it is written and to hold forth communication from itself. It, and not the author's intended meaning, becomes the subject.[1] A text embodies human experience, making it thereby accessible to and discernible by other human beings with the same experience or the potential for it. A text contains within it certain clues for interpretation which function as a set of permissions and prohibitions, serving to exclude some unfitting constructions and allowing some others which make better sense of the same words. Given the facts or traits of a text, one construction may be more probable and account for more aspects than another.[2] When a text begins to speak, it is not always in the same lifeless rigidity; it gives ever-new answers to the person who questions it and poses new questions to the one who answers it.[3] The various levels at which the present investigation has analyzed the text of the story of Ruth offer the possibility of uncovering as thoroughly as possible the various facets of meaning offered by the text: its communication from the level of form and the level of content, from rhetorical features, from time and space features, from plot dynamics, from character relationships, from motifs and their arrangements and articulations.

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[1] Ricouer, "Creativity in Language: Word, Polysemy, Metaphor," in Philosophy, pp. 120 ff. (hereafter cited as Ricoeur, "Creativity").

[2] Palmer, p. 209, discussing the thought of Gadamer.

[3] H. G. Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," in Hermeneutics, p. 29.

The interpreter of a text seeks to decipher the hidden meaning in the symbol's apparent meaning, to unfold levels of

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[1] Palmer, p. 174, discussing the thought of Gadamer.

[2] Ricoeur, "Main Problem," in Philosophy, pp. 142-143.

[3] H. G. Gadamer, "On the Problem of Self-Understanding," in Hermeneutics, pp. 57-58 (hereafter cited as Gadamer, "Self-Understanding").

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meaning implied in the literal meaning.[1] The task is to conquer a certain remoteness that exists between text and interpreter in order to make text and interpreter contemporaneous.[2] In order to achieve this goal the interpreter seeks to place the text within the horizons of the question which called it into being. In the case of the present study, that question seems to concern the return of seed to the field and the consequent burgeoning of life. The text itself offers numerous indications of both its basic symbol and its basic question, projecting its own meaning in front of itself, as it were. The meaning of a text is not so much hidden behind the text as rather disclosed in front of the text.[3] The text opens up a world, offers an horizon, by its communication.[4] The interpreter does not leave his or her own world in order to understand a text but rather allows his or her own horizons to fuse with those of the text.[5] It is the present perspective of the interpreter--a perspective that is itself part of the linguistic stream of tradition--[1] which, rather than being some sort of barrier to understanding, serves as the very entrance to understanding. The interpreter must question the text from his or her own perspective[2] and in fact must sense that the text addresses itself to him or her for true understanding to take place.[3] A new meaning comes from the interpreter, who constructs it in relation to what the text offers[4] and in relation to his or her own perspective.

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[1] Ricoeur, "Existence," in Philosophy, p. 98.

[2] Ibid., p. 101.

[3] Ricoeur, "Main Problem," in Philosophy, p. 144.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Palmer, p. 208, discussing the thought of Gadamer.

If the horizons or concerns of the interpreter are indeed vital to the process of interpretation, as has been suggested, and if the text needs to address those contemporary concerns before the interpretation of this story is complete, they must be indicated briefly. A number of factors have been influential in forming the perspective of the present interpreter, a perspective which has interacted with the text in order to suggest the interpretation that has been offered here. These factors--a sampling of which follow--have been caught up by the Biblical question of who is responsible to guard the rights of the poor, to see that their needs are met. A number of contemporary situations, then, meet this story of the return of seed to the field.

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[1] Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," in Hermeneutics, p. 9.

[2] Gadamer, "Self-Understanding," in Hermeneutics, p. 57.

[3] Ibid., pp. 57-58.

[4] Ricoeur, "Main Problem," in Philosophy, pp. 141-142.

1) The world can be compared to ten children at a table, dividing up food. The three healthiest load their plates with large portions--most of the meat, fish, milk and eggs. They eat as much as they want and discard what remains. Two of the other children are able to eat just enough to meet their basic requirements. The remaining five children are malnourished: three of them manage to eat bread and rice, but the other two cannot do even that, and so sicken and die.[1]

2) Currently some $400 billion is spent annually by national leaders for military purposes, with the amount escalating each year. Such emphasis drains the ability of nations to respond to human needs, such as the hunger of their people.[2]

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[1] A. Simon, *Bread for the World* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), p. 14. P. Henriot, S.J., "Food Policy," in *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, gen. ed. W. T. Reich (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 1978): 494, argues that central to the hunger problem is the fact that the poorer segments of the world face the fullest impact of the scarcity. A piece of information of F. M. Lappé, "Fantasies of Famine," *Harper's Magazine* 250 (1975):56, highlights this imbalance: When the *Titanic* sank, 56% of the third class passengers died; only 4% of the 143 first-class passengers lost their lives.

[2] M. T. Macgillis, O.P. and G. Mische, "Hunger and World Order," (East Orange, N.J.: Global Education Associates, rev. ed., 1980): 3. According to B. Keene, "Export-Cropping in Central America," Bread for the World Background Paper 43 (1980): n.p. Leaders of a number of nations in Central America feel they must choose to export beef in order to gain needed capital rather than use their agricultural resources to feed their own people. Smaller landholders are pushed off the land by more powerful and supposedly more efficient agricultural conglomerates. As a result of such factors, consumers in the United States have been able to increase their consumption of beef and veal 41% between 1961 and 1976.

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3) More than half of the produce of our agricultural land is fed to animals. In this country animals are fed as much grain as all China and India eat every year.[1]

4) Research prepared for presentation to the World Food Conference held in Rome in 1974 indicated that approximately 460 million people in the world are affected by malnutrition.[2]

5) P. Weiss, founder of the organization Los Niños whose project it is both to feed the hungry children of today and to work through education to lessen the chance that there will be hungry children tomorrow, wonders why in spite of a technology which put 11 million new cars on U. S. superhighways in 1978, he needs to drive 250 miles every weekend so that the orphans in Tijuana (a city whose beaches and racetracks are visited by 10 million North Americans per year) can receive food.[3]

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[1] Lappé, p. 52. According to J. B. Hehir, "Food: The Crisis and the Church," in Our Daily Bread 1 (1975): 14, large corporations in the United States are estimated to control approximately 90% of the world's grain reserves. Four are privately held and are therefore not required by law to give an account of themselves to either the government or to the public.

[2] Henriot, p. 494.

[3] P. Weiss, "Making a Difference Beyond the Barbed Wire," Sojourners 8 (1979): 25.

Such situations in the contemporary world, heightened painfully by questions of human stewardship and responsibility, by questions of the relationship between the deprivation of peoples' physical nourishment and their access to the kinds of social, intellectual and spiritual experiences necessary for the fulness of human growth, by the paradox of relative affluence of groups of professionally religious people in a world where most people are deprived, rise, converge, and meet a text such as the book of Ruth.

The result of such a confrontation is necessarily the liberation of significant potential from the text.[1] New meaning is produced by the interaction of text and interpreter[2] as the meaning of the text is disclosed in front of it,[3] between the text and the reader. New being comes into existence.[4] The text itself proposes questions to the interpreter, with the effect that the horizons of the interpreter are enlarged.[5] Some of the crucial questions proposed by the Biblical story of Ruth include the following: 1) Who is the Lord, described so simply and beautifully and yet so thoroughly as the owner and cultivator of a field, and as a man so responsive to the needs of the poor and foreign widow Ruth?

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[1] Ricoeur, "Language," in Philosophy, p. 236.

[2] Ricoeur, "Main Problem," In Philosophy, p. 141.

[3] Ibid., p. 144.

[4] Ricoeur, "Creativity," in Philosophy, p. 123.

[5] Ricoeur, "Main Problem, in Philosophy, pp. 144-145.

2) What does it mean that God stoops to hear the widow's word, hearkens to the cry of the poor? Where does such a relationship place those of us who neither cry out nor hear the cry?
3) What is the role of the human being--in fact of women--in the face of the need for new life? What does it mean that it is only through the insistence of the two women that the fulness of the return of life is achieved?
4) How does the anger of Naomi and her sense of injustice work? What does it suggest about the justice of God and the human participation in effecting it?
5) What aspects of the women's characters, lives, and faith are utilized in order to describe the fulness of their contribution as bearers of life on all levels?
6) What does the suitability of the image of the Lord and his bride, the ways in which they are brought so intimately together, suggest about the full suitability of women to be religious symbols?
7) Given the story of return of seed to the field, in what ways are we able still to doubt the ability of life to flourish on all levels of creation?

The ultimate result of interpretation and understanding is enrichment of the text and new self-understanding by the interpreter.[1] The interpreter risks his or her own horizons which are enlarged and fused with those of the text. Such an interpreter is never the same again; new insight brings new growth, new responsibility, new freedom. The present interpreter believes, as a result of knowledge of the story of Ruth, that there is a Lord deeply concerned for the life of human beings, a God who nourishes that life at every level. To acknowledge such a Lord who is fruitfulness itself is necessarily to acknowledge the right of all human beings to receive the fulness of life. To live in such a way as to prevent equal or adequate access to all of the goods that are necessary for life--whether physical, intellectual, spiritual--is to set oneself against God's purposes. In fact, belief in the Lord of Life calls one to the responsibility of participating in the struggle to make life accessible to all who are deprived of it. God hears the cry of the poor and responds; God is the strength of those persons who also hear the cries of the oppressed. The seed is plentiful, the earth is rich. The story invites us to contemplate the paradox of the abundant growth from the numerically small, of the necessity of struggle as part of new life, of the need to wait--but not wholly patiently. The task of helping the seed return to the earth is a simple one, ultimately, and a gentle and nonviolent one. To participate is itself to be drawn more fully to receive the abundance of life at every level, to be sheltered by God, drawn to his embrace, caught up into the fulness of Life itself.

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[1] Ricoeur, "Existence," in Philosophy, p. 101; Gadamer, "Self-Understanding," in Hermeneutics, pp. 57-58.

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